

**CAN YOU ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?**

1. Describe instances of religious coercion in the Babylonian empire, in the Persian empire, and in the Syrian Greek empire.
2. What Roman decree sparked the Bar Kochba revolt?
3. Describe the Church's attitude towards Jewry and Judaism.
4. Describe Mohammed's attitude towards Jewry and Judaism.
5. Who were the Almohads?

This and much more will be addressed in the eighth lecture of this series:

**"The Struggle for Spiritual and Physical Survival  
in a Christian and Moslem World"**

To derive maximum benefit from this lecture, keep these questions in mind as you listen to the lecture and read through the outline. Go back to these questions once again at the end of the lecture and see how well you answer them.

PLEASE NOTE: This outline and source book were designed as a powerful tool to help you appreciate and understand the basis of Jewish History. Although the lectures can be listened to without the use of the outline, we advise you to read the outline to enhance your comprehension. Use it, as well, as a handy reference guide and for quick review.

**This lecture is dedicated to the honor and merit of the  
Elchonen and Kapelowitz Families.**

## THE EPIC OF THE ETERNAL PEOPLE

Presented by Rabbi Shmuel Irons

### SERIES XXIV: THE PANORAMA OF JEWISH HISTORY LECTURE VIII: THE STRUGGLE FOR SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL SURVIVAL IN A CHRISTIAN AND MOSLEM WORLD

#### I. Forced Assimilation in the Pre-Roman Era

##### A.

ושמואל אמר (ויקרא כ"ו): לא מאסתים ולא געלתים לכלתם לא מאסתים - בימי יוונים, ולא געלתים - בימי אספסיינוס, לכלתם - בימי המן, להפר בריתי אתם - בימי רומיים, כי אני ד' א-להיהם - בימי גוג ומגוג. במתניתא תנא: לא מאסתים - בימי כשדים, שהעמדתי להם דניאל חנניה מישאל ועזריה, ולא געלתים - בימי יוונים, שהעמדתי להם שמעון הצדיק, וחשמונאי ובניו, ומתתיה כהן גדול, לכלתם - בימי המן, שהעמדתי להם מרדכי ואסתר, להפר בריתי אתם, - בימי פרסיים, שהעמדתי להם של בית רבי וחכמי דורות, כי אני ד' א-להיהם - לעתיד לבוא, שאין כל אומה ולשון יכולה לשלוט בהם. מגילה יא.

Shmuel quoted (Leviticus 26:44), "I did not reject them, neither did I abhor them to destroy them utterly." 'I did not reject them' in the days of the Greeks; 'neither did I abhor them' — in the days of Nebuchadnezzar; 'to destroy them utterly' — in the days of Haman; 'and to break my covenant with them' — in the days of the Persians;<sup>27</sup> 'for I am the L-rd their G-d' — in the days of Gog and Magog. In a Baraita it was taught: 'I have not rejected them' — in the days of the Chaldeans, when I raised up for them Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; 'neither did I abhor them' — in the days of the Greeks, when I raised up for them Shimon HaTzaddik (the Righteous) and Hasmonai and his sons, and Mattathias the High Priest; 'to destroy them utterly' — in the days of Haman, when I raised up for them Mordecai and Esther; 'to break my covenant with them' — in the days of the Romans (Persians), when I raised up for them the members of the house of Rabbi and the Sages of the various generations. 'For I am the L-rd their G-d' — in the time to come, when no nation or people<sup>31</sup> will be able to subject them. **Megillah 11a**

##### B.

(1) אִיִּי גְבָרִין יְהוּדָאִין דִּי־מְנִית יְתְהוֹן עַל־עֲבִידַת מְדִינַת כְּכַל שְׁדֵרְךָ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעַבְדֵּךָ נְגוּ גְבָרִיא אֱלֹהֵי לֹא־שְׁמוּ עֲלֶיךָ מְלֶכָא טַעֲם לֹא־לְהִיךְ לֹא־לְהִיךְ לֹא פְלִחִין וְלִצְלָם דִּהֲבָא דִּי הִקִּימְתָּ לֹא סְגָדִין: בְּאֲדִין נְבוּכַדְנֶצַּר בְּרַגְזוֹ וְחִמָּה אָמַר לְהִיתִיָּה לְשְׁדֵרְךָ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעַבְדֵּךָ נְגוּ בְּאֲדִין גְּבָרִיא אֱלֹהֵי הִיתִיו קְדָם מְלֶכָא: עֲנָה נְבֻכַדְנֶצַּר וְאָמַר לְהוֹן הֲצִדָּא שְׁדֵרְךָ מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל וְעַבְדֵּךָ נְגוּ לֹא־לְהִי לֹא אִיתִיכוֹן פְּלִחִין וְלִצְלָם דִּהֲבָא דִּי הִקִּימְתָּ לֹא סְגָדִין: דְּנִיָּאל גִּיב־יֵד

There are certain Jews whom you have set over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego; these men, O king, have not regarded you; they serve not your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up. Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said to them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, that you do not serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? **Daniel 3:12-14**

(2) שאלו תלמידיו את רבי שמעון בן יוחאי: מפני מה נתחייבו שונאיהן של ישראל שבאותו הדור כליה? אמר להם: אמרו אתם - אמרו לו: מפני שנהנו מסעודתו של אותו רשע. - אם כן שבשושן יהרגו, שבכל העולם כולו אל יהרגו - אמרו לו: אמור אתה - אמר להם: מפני שהשתחו

לצלם. - אמרו לו: וכי משוא פנים יש בדבר? - אמר להם: הם לא עשו אלא לפנים - אף הקדוש ברוך הוא לא עשה עמהן אלא לפנים, והיינו דכתיב (איכה ג') כי לא ענה מלבו. מגילה יב.

R. Shimon b. Yohai was asked by his disciples, Why were the enemies of Israel (a euphemism for the Jews) in that generation deserving of extermination? He said to them: What is your opinion? They said: Because they partook of the feast of that wicked one (Achashverash). [He said to them]: If so, those in Sushan should have been killed, not those in other parts? They then said, Give your answer. He said to them: It was because they bowed down to the image [during the time of Nebuchadnezzar]. They said to him, Did G-d then show them favoritism? He replied: They only pretended to worship, and He also only pretended to exterminate them; and so it is written (Lamentations 3:33), "For He afflicted not from His heart." **Megilah 12a**

C.

(1) לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה אֹרֶה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשָׂשׂוֹן וְיִקָּר: אִסְתֵּר ח:טז

The Jews had light, and gladness, and joy, and honor. **Esther 8:16**

(2) אמר רב יהודה: אורה - זו תורה, וכן הוא אומר כי נר מצוה ותורה אור. שמחה - זה יום טוב, וכן הוא אומר ושמחת בחגך, ששון - זו מילה, וכן הוא אומר שש אנכי על אמרתך ויקר - אלו תפלין, וכן הוא אומר וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ד' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך ותניא, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר: אלו תפלין שבראש. מגילה טז:

**The Jews had light and gladness and joy and honor.** Rav Yehudah said: 'Light' means the Torah, and so it says (Proverbs 6:23), "For the commandment is a lamp and the Torah is a light." 'Gladness' means *Yom Tov* - a feast day; and so it says (Deuteronomy 16:14), "And you shall be glad *BiChagecha* - in your feast." 'Joy' means *Milah* - circumcision; and so it says (Psalms 119:162), "I rejoice at Your word." 'Honor' means *tefilin* - the phylacteries, and so it says (Deuteronomy 28:10), "And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the L-rd is called upon you, and they shall be afraid of you;" and it has been taught: R. Eliezar the Great says that this refers to the *tefilin* - phylactery of the head. **Megila 16b**

(3) אורה זו תורה - שגזר עליהן המן שלא יעסקו בתורה. זהו יום טוב - קיימו עליהם ימים טובים. זו מילה - ועל כל אלה גזר. רש"י שם

**'Light' means the Torah:** Haman decreed upon them not be involved in Torah study **'Gladness' means** [*qo"Vqxc*" They made a commitment to observe the *Yomim Tovim* - the holidays." **'Joy' means** *Okncj* - **circumcision:** On all of these did [Haman] decree. **Rashi ibid.**

D. But when Ptolemy [Soter] had taken a great many captives, both from the mountainous part of Judea and from the places about Jerusalem and Samaria, and the places near Mount Gerizim, he led them all into Egypt and settled them there. . . . Nay there were not a few other Jews who, of their own accord, went into Egypt, as invited by the goodness of the soil, and by the liberality of Ptolemy I. **Josephus, Antiquities Book XII Chapter 1**

E. When Alexander had reigned twelve years and after him Ptolemy Soter forty years, Philadelphus then took the kingdom of Egypt, and held it forty years within one. He procured the Torah to be translated, and set free those that were come from Jerusalem into Egypt, and were in slavery there, who numbered *c"jwpftgf"cpf"vygprf"vjqwucpf.* **Josephus, Antiquities Book XII Chapter 2**

F. Now it came to pass, after two years, in the hundred forty and fifth year, on the twenty-fifth day of that month, which is by us called Chasleu and by the Macedonians Apelleus, in the hundred and fifty-third Olympiad, that the king came up to Jerusalem, and pretending peace, he got possession of the city by treachery; at which time he spared not so much as those that admitted him into it, on account of the riches that lay in the temple; but led by his covetous inclination, (for he saw there was in it a great deal of gold, and many ornaments that had been dedicated to it of very great value,) and in order to plunder its wealth, he ventured to break the league he had made. So he left the temple bare; and took away the golden candlesticks, and the golden altar of incense, and table of shew-bread, ... and did not abstain from even the veils, which were made of fine linen and scarlet. He also emptied it of its secret treasures and left nothing at all remaining; and by these means cast the Jews into great lamentation, for he forbade them to offer those daily sacrifices which they used to offer to G-d, according to the law. And when he had pillaged the whole city, some of the inhabitants he slew, and some he carried captive, together with their wives and children, so that the multitude of those captives that were taken alive amounted to about ten thousand. He also burnt down the finest buildings; and when he had overthrown the city walls, he built a citadel in the lower part of the city, for the place was high and overlooked the temple, on which account he fortified it with high walls and towers; and put into it a garrison of Macedonians. However, in that citadel dwelt the impious and wicked part of the Jewish multitude, from whom it proved that the citizens suffered many and sore calamities. And when the king had built an idol altar upon G-d's altar, he slew swine upon it, and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled them to forsake the worship which they paid their own G-d and to adore those whom he took to be gods, and made them build temples, and raise idol altars in every city and village, and offer swine upon them every day. He also commanded them not to circumcise their sons, and threatened to punish any that should be found to have transgressed his injunctions. He also appointed overseers, who should compel them to do what he commanded. And indeed many Jews there were who complied with the king's commands, either voluntarily or out of fear of the penalty that was denounced but the best men, and those of the noblest souls, did not regard him, but did pay a greater respect to the customs of their country, that concern as to the punishment which he threatened to the disobedient on which account they every day underwent great miseries, and bitter torments, for they were whipped with rods, and their bodies were torn to pieces, and were crucified, while they were still alive, and breathed; They also strangled those women and their sons whom they had circumcised, as the king had appointed, hanging their sons about their necks as they were upon the crosses. And if there were any sacred book of the law found, it was destroyed, and those with whom they were found miserably perished also. **Antiquities XII 5:3, 4**

G.

בימי מתתיהו בן יוחנן כהן גדול חשמונאי ובניו. כשעמדה מלכות יון הרשעה על עמך ישראל להשכיחם תורתך ולהעבירם מחקי רצונך: ואתה ברחמך הרבים עמדת להם בעת צרתם. . . . סידור

In the days of Matisyahu the son of Yochanon, the High Priest, Chashamonai and his sons, when the evil kingdom of Greece (Syria) got up against Your people Israel to force them to forget Your Torah and to make them violate your commandments, You, in Your great compassion stood up for them at the time of their troubles . . . **Siddur**

II. Life Under the Romans

A. The reason a war broke out with Judea was because of a prohibition about mutilating the genitals (circumcision). **Spartianus, Hadrian, 13**

(2) אמריןן במדרש חלב מטמא חלב מטהר כשנולד רבי גזרו שלא למול ואביו ואמו מלוהו שלח קיסר והביאו לרבי ואמו לפניו והחליפתו אמו באנטונינוס והניקתו עד שהביאתו לפני קיסר ומצאוהו ערל ופטרום לשלו' ואמר אותו הגמון אני ראיתי שמלו את זה אלא הקב"ה עושה להם נסים בכל עת ובטלו הגזרה. תוספות עבודה זרה י':

We were taught in a Midrash: Milk has the power to make impure and milk has the power to purify. When Rabbi was born they (the Romans) made a decree that it is forbidden to perform circumcision. [Rabbi's] parents had him circumcised. Caesar sent for Rabbi and his mother to be brought before him. His mother exchanged him for Antoninus and nursed him until she brought him before Caesar who found him uncircumcised. He let them leave in peace. That governor [who had accused them] said: I [myself] saw that they had performed circumcision on that [child]. However, the Holy One, blessed be He, constantly performs miracles for them. They [eventually] repealed the decree. **Tosephos Avodah Zara 10b**

B.

אמר רבי מאיר פעם אחת היינו יושבין לפני רבי עקיבא בבית המדרש והיינו קורין את השמע ולא היינו משמיעים לאזנינו מפני קסדור אחד שהיה עומד על הפתח. תוספתא ברכות ב:יג

Rabbi Meir said: Once we were sitting before Rabbi Akiva in the Bais Medrash (Study Hall) and we were reciting the "Shma" but we didn't recite it loud enough for our ears to hear because of a Roman officer that was standing by the doorway. **Tosephta Berochos 2:13**

C. Hadrian then commanded that by a legal decree and ordinances the whole nation should be absolutely prevented from entering from thenceforth even the district round Jerusalem, so that not even from a distance could it see its ancestral home. Ariston of Pella tells the story. Thus when the city came to be bereft of the nation of the Jews, and its ancient inhabitants had completely perished, it was colonized by foreigners, and the Roman city which afterwards arose changed its name, and in honour of the reigning emperor Aelius Hadrian was called Aelia. The church, too, in it was composed of Gentiles, and after the Jewish bishops [ceased to serve in that capacity], the first [non-Jew] who was appointed to minister to those there was Marcus. **Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, IV. 6**

D.

תנו רבנן פעם אחת גזרה מלכות הרשעה שלא יעסקו ישראל בתורה בא פפוס בן יהודה ומצאו לרבי עקיבא שהיה מקהיל קהלות ברבים ועוסק בתורה אמר ליה עקיבא אי אתה מתירא מפני מלכות אמר לו אמשול לך משל למה הדבר דומה לשועל שהיה מהלך על גב הנהר וראה דגים שהיו מתקבצים ממקום למקום אמר להם מפני מה אתם בורחים אמרו לו מפני רשתות שמביאין עלינו בני אדם אמר להם רצונכם שתעלו ליבשה ונדור אני ואתם כשם שדרו אבותי עם אבותיכם אמרו לו אתה הוא שאומרים עליך פקח שבחיות לא פקח אתה אלא טפש אתה ומה במקום חיותנו אנו מתיראין במקום מיתתנו על אחת כמה וכמה אף אנחנו עכשיו שאנו יושבים ועוסקים בתורה שכתוב בה כי הוא חיך ואורך ימך כך אם אנו הולכים ומבטלים ממנה עאכ"ו אמרו לא היו ימים מועטים עד שתפסוהו לר"ע וחבשוהו בבית האסורים ותפסו לפפוס בן יהודה וחבשוהו אצלו אמר לו פפוס מי הביאך לכאן אמר ליה אשריך רבי עקיבא שנתפסת על דברי תורה אוי לו לפפוס שנתפס על דברים בטלים בשעה שהוציאו את ר' עקיבא להריגה זמן ק"ש היה והיו סורקים את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים אמרו לו תלמידיו רבינו עד כאן אמר להם כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה בכל נפשך אפילו נוטל את נשמתך אמרתי מתי יבא לידי ואקיימנו ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו היה מאריך באחד עד שיצתה נשמתו באחד יצתה ב"ק ואמרה אשריך ר"ע שיצאה נשמתך באחד

אמרו מלאכי השרת לפני הקב"ה זו תורה וזו שכרה ממתים ידך י"י ממתים וגו' אמר להם חלקם בחיים יצתה בת קול ואמרה אשריך ר"ע שאתה מזומן לחיי העוה"ב. ברכות סא:

Our Rabbis taught: Once the wicked Government issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practice the Torah. Pappus ben Yehudah came and found Rabbi Akiva publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah. He said to Him: Akiva, are you not afraid of the Government? He replied: I will explain to you with a parable. A fox was once walking alongside of a river, and he saw fish going in swarms from one place to another. He said to them: From what are you fleeing? They replied: From the nets cast for us by men. He said to them: Would you like to come up on to the dry land so that you and I can live together in the way that my ancestors lived with your ancestors? They replied: Art thou the one that they call the cleverest of animals? Thou art not clever but foolish. If we are afraid in the element in which we live, how much more in the element in which we would die! So it is with us. If such is our condition when we sit and study the Torah, of which it is written, "For that is thy life and the length of thy days" (Deuteronomy 30:20), if we go and neglect it how much worse off we shall be! It is related that soon afterwards Rabbi Akiva was arrested and thrown into prison, and Pappus ben Yehudah was also arrested and imprisoned next to him. He said to him: Pappus, who brought you here? He replied: Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that you have been seized for busying yourself with the Torah! Alas for Pappus who has been seized for busying himself with idle things! When Rabbi Akiva was taken out for execution, it was the hour for the recital of the 'Shema', and while they combed his flesh with iron combs, he was accepting upon himself the kingship of heaven. His disciples said to him: Our teacher, even to this point? He said to them: All my days I have been troubled by this verse, "With all thy soul" (Deuteronomy 6:5), which I interpret, "even if He takes thy soul." I said: When shall I have the opportunity of fulfilling this? Now that I have the opportunity shall I not fulfill it? He prolonged the word "echad" until he expired while saying it. A Bas Kol went forth and proclaimed: Happy are you, Akiva, that your soul has departed with the word "echad"! The ministering angels said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Such Torah and such a reward? He should have been "from them that die by Your hand, O L-rd" (Psalms 17:14). He replied to them: "Their portion is in life." (Ibid.) A *bas kol* went forth and proclaimed, "Happy are you, Rabbi Akiva, that you are destined for the life of the world to come." **Berachos 61b**

E.

ועשה חסד לאלפים לאהבי ולשמרי מצותי. רבי נתן אומר . . . אלו ישראל שיושבין בארץ ישראל ונותנין נפשם על המצות. מה לך ויצא ליהרג על שמלתי את בני. מה לך יוצא לישרף על שקראתי בתורה. מה לך יוצא ליצלב על שאכלתי המצה. מה לך לוקה מאפרגל על שנטלתי את הלולב. מכלתא פ' יתרו פ"ו

"And shows kindness unto thousands [of generations] of those that love Me and keep My commandments." (Exodus 20:6) Rabbi Noson stated: . . . This refers to those that dwell in the land of Israel and give up their lives in order to perform the commandments. "Why are you going out to be killed?" "Because I circumcised my son." "Why are you going out to be burned [alive at the stake]?" "Because I read the Torah." "Why are you going out to be crucified?" "Because I ate matzah." "Why are you going out to be whipped?" "Because I took a lulav." **Mechilta Yisro Parsha 6**

F.

פעם אחת גזרו המלכות שלא ישמרו את השבת ושלא ימולו את בניהם ושיבעלו את הנדות. מעילה י"י.

Once, the government (of Rome) decreed that they should not observe the Sabbath, they should not circumcise their sons, and they should have marital relations with their wives while being in a state of Nidah (menstrual impurity). **Meilah 17a**

G.

בעשרים ותמניא ביה אתת בשורתא טבתא ליהודאי דלא יעידון מאורייתא. שגזרה מלכות הרשעה שמד על ישראל שלא יעסקו בתורה, ושלא ימולו את בניהם, ושיחללו שבתות. מה עשה יהודה בן שמוע וחביריו? הלכו ונטלו עצה ממטרוניתא אחת שכל גדולי רומי מצויין אצלה. אמרה להם: בואו והפגינו בלילה. הלכו והפגינו בלילה, אמרו: אי שמים לא אחיכם אנחנו, ולא בני אב אחד אנחנו, ולא בני אם אחת אנחנו? מה נשתנינו מכל אומה ולשון שאתם גוזרין עלינו גזירות קשות וביטלום. ואותו היום עשאוהו יום טוב. ראש השנה יט.

On the twenty-eighth thereof [of Adar] came glad tidings to the Jews that they should not abandon the practice of the Torah. For the Government [of Rome] had issued a decree that they should not study the Torah and that they should not circumcise their sons and that they should profane the Sabbath. What did Yehudah b. Shammu'a and his colleagues do? They went and consulted a certain matron whom all the Roman notables used to visit.<sup>7</sup> She said to them: "Go and make proclamation [of your sorrows] at night time". They went and proclaimed at night, crying, "Alas, in heaven's name, are we not your brothers, are we not the sons of one father and are we not the sons of one mother? Why are we different from every nation and tongue that you issue such harsh decrees against us?" The decrees were thereupon annulled, and that day was declared a feast day. **Rosh HaShanah 19a**

### III. Jewish Life in the Byzantine Empire

A. As long as the Synagogue has flourished, the Church has labored. The defeat of the Synagogue is the strength of the Church and the death of the synagogue is the beginning of the Church - the beginning not of nature but of salvation. **St. Ambrose of Milan (339-397), Explanations of St. Luke's Gospel viii 44**

B. Holding fast to their ancient anger and violence, still today under the name of Nazarenes, the Jews in their synagogues blaspheme the Christian flock; and while they slay us, they will their own destruction in the eternal fire. **St. Jerome (342-420), Commentary to Amos I**

C. If then it was a den of thieves when it still ruled the affairs of state, now if one were to call it a brothel, a den of iniquity, an abode of demons, or a stronghold and pit of the devil, or whatever, one would be calling it less than it deserves. **St. John Chrysostom (347-407)**

D. Let no one dare to desecrate or forcibly entering, prohibit the customs of the Jews in their assemblies, or disturb the readings of their prayers in the synagogues, since they should be allowed to retain all their customs in peace according to their law without interference of their religion and cult. . . . We decree this, albeit it seems that enough has been stated about this matter in the laws promulgated by past emperors. **Honorius to Johannes Code of Theodorus 16, 8, 20; 7/26/412**

E. If there be any temples in the country districts, let them be demolished without disturbance or tumult. **Theodosian Code xvi 10.16; (415)**

F. It is decreed that in the future no synagogues of the Jews anywhere are to be pulled down or burned down, and if, after decree, any synagogues are seized or consecrated as churches or

devoted somehow to the holy mysteries by a new attack, sites of sufficient extent for these places where they can build new synagogues are to be furnished for the Jews. . . . **Moreover, no further synagogues are to be constructed, and the old ones are to remain in their present state of repair. Theodosian Code xvi 8. 25; 2/15/423**

G. Justinian (525-567) proclaimed that it was forbidden for Jews to celebrate the holiday of Pesach before the Christians celebrate Easter, for it was considered a humiliation for Christianity [to have the Jews celebrate first]. In the year that preceded the intercalated year, in which Pesach normally precedes Easter, the Jews were severely punished for eating matzos and praying the holiday prayers on Pesach. In addition, Justinian tried to influence the Jews in the spirit of Christianity by requiring them to publicly translate the Torah to Latin or Greek when it was read in the synagogue on Shabbos (Novella 146-553 C.E.). For this purpose he required that the Septuagint, the then standard Christian translation, be used. Special officers were appointed in order to ensure compliance. **Tekufas HaGaonim, Rabbi Simcha Asaf**

H. פיוטין אלו שנהגו העולם למימרינון חזי לנא לרבוותא שאמרו שלא נתקן אלא בשעת השמד בלחוד מפני שלא היו יכולין להזכיר דברי תורה, כי היו גוזרין האויבים על ישראל שלא לעסוק בתורה ועל כן היו חכמים שביניהם מתקנין להם בכלל התפילה להזכיר ולהזהיר לעמי הארץ הלכות חג בחג והלכות ימים טובים והלכות שבתות ודקדוקי המצות בדרך שבחות והודיות וחרוזות ופיוטים. ספר העתים לר"י ברצלוני

According to what we have seen [written from] our Rabbis, the Piutim that the world is accustomed to say, were only instituted at a time of Shmad (Novella 146 to the Justinian Code - 553 C.E.). Because they were unable to mention words of Torah due to the decree that the enemies imposed on the Jews to forbid the learning of Torah, the Sages amongst them instituted the Piutim as part of the prayers in order to mention and alert the common people regarding the laws of the Holidays and Shabbos and the minutiae in the form of praises and thanks and stanzas and poems. **Sefer Ha-Itim, Rabbi Yehudah of Barcelona**

I. וכן אמר מר יהודאי ז"ל שגזרו שמד על בני ארץ ישראל שלא יקראו קריית שמע ולא יתפללו והיו מניחין אותן ליכנס שחרית בשבת לומר ולזמר מעמדות (פיוטים וקרובות) והיו אומרים בשחרית מעמד וקדוש ושמע בגניבה והיו עושים דברים הללו באונס ועכשיו שכילה הקב"ה מלכות אדום ובטל גזרותיה ובאו ישמעאלים והניחום לעסוק בתורה וקרוא ק"ש ולהתפלל אסור לומר אלא דבר דבור במקומו כתיקון חכו"ל תורה במקומה ואסור והיתר (פיוטים) במקומו ותפילה במקומו. (פרקי בן באבוי, בגנזי שכטר)

Mar Yehudai of blessed memory said that they (Byzantium) decreed Shmad on the land of Israel (553 C.E.) that they should not recite Shema and they shouldn't pray. They did let them, however, enter [the synagogue] to sing "maamodos" (piutim and "krovos"). They would say a "maamad" and would slip in Kedusha and Shema. They did these things [only] under duress. Now that the Holy One blessed be He destroyed the kingdom of Edom and annulled his decrees and the Arabs came in and let them study Torah and read Shema and pray, it is forbidden to say anything except that which was originally instituted by our Sages of blessed memory: Torah in its place and [the poems that describe] that which is permitted and forbidden in its place, and prayer in its proper place. **Pirkei ben BaBoi, Ginzei Schecter**

J.

שגזרו אדום הרשעה שמד על ארץ ישראל שלא יקראו בתורה וגנזו כל ספרי תורה מפני שהיו שורפין אותן. וכשבאו ישמעאלים לא היו להם ספרי תורה ולא היו להם סופרים שיש בידם הלכה למעשה כיצד מעבדין את העורות ובאיזה צד כותבין ספרי תורה והיו לוקחין ריק מן הגוים שעשו לכתוב בהן ספרי עבודה זרה והיו כותבין בהם ספרי תורה מפני שלא היה בידם הלכה למעשה ועד עכשיו הם נוהגין כך. (פרקי בן באבוי, בגנזי שכטר)

The evil [kingdom of] Edom (Byzantium) decreed *Shmad* on the land of Israel that they not read the Torah. They [subsequently] hid all the Sifrei Torah because they would burn them. When the Arabs came, the Jews did not have Sifrei Torah nor did they have scribes with the practical knowledge of the halacha of finishing the hides [to make parchment] and knowing upon which side to write the Sefer Torah. They would take unfinished hides from the non Jews which they used to write books for their religion and write Sifrei Torah with them. This is all because they did not know practical halacha. They are doing so to this day. **Pirkei ben BaBoi, Ginzei Schechter**

#### IV. Slaves and Circumcision

A. If any Jew has purchased and circumcised a Christian slave or one of any other sect than his own, he shall not keep the circumcised slave in servitude, but the man who has suffered this outrage shall be granted the rights of liberty. **Constantine to Felix, Code of Theodosius 16, 9, 1; 10/21/335**

B. If any Jew has obtained a slave of another sect or national group than his own, the slave shall at once be confiscated to the public exchequer; furthermore, if he has circumcised the slave after buying him, then not only shall he suffer the confiscation of the slave, but also he shall meet capital punishment. But if the Jew has purchased slaves known to be of the holy faith, then all the goods found in his possession shall be taken from him at once. **Constantinius to Evagrius, Code of Theodosius 16, 9, 2; 8/13/339**

C. We decree that Jewish masters may possess Christian slaves without reproach, but only on condition that they permit these slaves to follow their own religion. **Honorius to Annatus Didascalus and the Elders of the Jews, Code of Theodosius 16, 9, 3; 11/6/415**

D. If any Jew keeps Christian slaves, the slaves are to be freed and placed in the custody of the church, according to the law of Constantine. **Theodosius II to Aurelian Code of Theodosius 16, 8, 22; 10/2/415**

E. Jews must not purchase Christian slaves nor acquire them as gifts. Let Jews who have impudently disobeyed this decree stop acquiring Christian slaves, and let the slaves themselves be granted freedom if the Jews voluntarily confess what they have done. But under this law, we permit this Jewish sect to possess other slaves whom this evil superstition chooses to consider members of the true faith according to its own opinion, or others who follow this faith because of oath or legacy. . . . **The Jews who are authors of such great crimes shall be punished with capital punishment and also loss of all their property. Theodosius to Manaxius Code of Theodosius 16/9/10; 4/9/423**

## V. Socialization

A. Moreover if any cleric or layman has eaten with the Jews, it is decreed that he shall not receive holy communion, in order to force him to mend his ways. **Canon 50 of the Council of Elvira Spain circa 300**

B. No priest shall . . . be friendly or sociable with Jews: nor should nay one take food or drink with the Jews: . . . and the synod shall excommunicate any one who does not comply with this order. **Arabian Collection of the Canons of Nicaea (325) Canon 70**

C. Concerning those women previously employed in our weaving factories whom the Jews have taken to wife in their lewd wedlock, it is decreed that they be restored to the factory and that care be taken in the future that no Jew link Christian women with their malpractices; but if they do so, **they shall suffer capital punishment. Constantinius to Evagrius Code of Theodosius 16, 8, 6; 8/13/339**

## VI. Individual Rights and Religious Freedom

A. We cannot command religion, for no one believes against his will under compulsion. **Edict of Milan 313 C.E.; The decree of Theodoric (king of the Ostrogoths who ruled Italy 493-526) regarding the Jews of Genoa**

B. It is evident that the Jewish sect is not prohibited by any law. We are therefore seriously concerned to learn that Jewish meetings have been banned in certain localities. Therefore, you Excellency will, upon the receipt of this order, restrain with proper vigor the excesses of those persons who, under the name of the Christian religion, have presumed to destroy synagogues and ruin them or commit other illegal actions. **Theodosius the Great to Addeus, Commander in Chief of the Eastern Provinces. Code of Theodosius 16, 8, 9; 9/29/393**

C. They [the Jews] are the only surviving religion from the past which persists in its frequent conventicles without accepting the name of Christian. **St. Augustine (354-430) Letter 118**

So it was appointed that they [the Jewish people] should not be destroyed in such a way that their sect should be altogether annulled; but it was scattered over the lands of the earth as carrying the prophecies of grace conferred on us. **St. Augustine, On Faith in Things Not Seen**

No one should forbid Jews from practicing Judaism, although Christian teaching would not compel them to do so. **St. Augustine, Letter 82 (to St. Jerome)**

D. We decree that no Jew or Samaritan no matter what law he brings forward, shall accede to dignities and honors, or perform the duties of any civil post, or even enjoy the position of an advocate. . . . But let this exception be made, namely that the members of the aforementioned sects may follow at least in private suits, opinions from their own judges; but they must not superintend the public jail, lest Christians, as is wont to occur, sometimes suffer another imprisonment because of the odiousness of the guards, being uncertain whether they may lawfully be imprisoned under Jews. **Theodosius II to Florentius, Novella III; 1/31/438**

## VII. Dhimmis and Forced Conversions under Islam

A. And humiliation and wretchedness were stamped upon them and they were visited with wrath from G-d. **Koran 2:61**

B. Fight those to whom the Scriptures were given, who believe not in Allah nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which Allah hath forbidden by His messenger (Muhammed), and follow not the religion of truth, until they pay the tribute (*jizya*) readily, **being brought low.** **Koran 9:29**

C. By the payment of *jizya*, the Jews became *dhimmis*, protected subjects; were the tax to be abolished, Jewish blood would be shed freely. **Netira's appeal to Caliph al-Mu'tadid (892-902) to reinstate the Jewish poll tax that he had abolished.**

D.

ולאחר פטירת רב יוסף הלוי שמם העולם מן הישיבות של חכמה ואע"פ שרב מאיר בנו ור' מאיר בן אחיו היו תלמידיו ובעלי קבלתו והם חכמים גדולים אבל מפני הרעה נאסף הצדיק. ואחר פטירת רב יוסף הלוי ז"ל היו שני חירום וגזרות ושמדות על ישראל ויצאו בגלות ממקומותם אשר למות למות ואשר לחרב לחרב ואשר לרעב לרעב ואשר לשבי לשבי ועוד מוסף על נבואת ירמיה ואשר לצאת מן הכלל יצא מפני חרב אבן תמורת שיצא לעולם בשנת תתק"ב (תתע"ב) שגזר להוציא את ישראל מן הכלל ואמרו לכו ונכחידם מגוי ולא יזכר שם ישראל עוד וכן לא השאיר להם בכל מלכותו שם ושאר במדינת צלא מקצה העולם עד מדינת אלמהדיה ומפני כן לא יכלו בניו של רב יוסף להושיב ישיבות אלא גלו בראש גולים למדינת טליטלה והיו משתדלים להעמיד תלמידים כפי יכלתם והב"ה הסכים על ידם והם סוף חכמי התלמוד בזה הזמן. ראב"ד ספר הקבלה

After the passing of Rav Yosef HaLevi the world became bereft of yeshivos, the source of wisdom. Even though Rav Meir, his son and Rav Meir his nephew, were his disciples, received his traditions and were immense scholars [who should have inherited his mantle], the *tzaddik* [Rav Yosef] died right before the beginning of terrible times. After the passing of Rav Yosef HaLevi, z"l, there were years of hostilities, decrees and enforced conversion of Jews. The [population] left and went into exile. Those who were for death, to death; and those who were for the sword, to the sword; and those who were for the famine, to the famine; and those who were for captivity, to the captivity. [Paraphrasing Jeremiah 15:2] There was something that was worse than the prophecy of Jeremiah: Those who were for apostasy, to become apostates. This was due to the sword of ibn Tumart (Almohads) who went forth to [reek havoc on] the world in the year 1142 (1112) and decreed to force Jews to leave the community [of faith]. They said: Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may no longer be remembered (Psalms 83:5). And so it was. No remnant of the Jewish people remained in all of the kingdom of *Tzala* at one end of the world until *al Mahdia*. Because of this, the sons of Rav Yosef could not establish yeshivas. Rather, they went into exile to the city of Toledo. There they tried to establish disciples to the best of their ability. The Holy One, blessed be He, approved of their actions and helped them. These scholars represent the last of the Sages of the Talmud in our times. **Raavad Sefer HaKabbalah**

E.

שאל שאל איש מאנשי דורנו לאיש מאנשי החכמה לפי דבריו ממי שלא קרה עליהם ממה שקרה על רוב קהלות ישראל מזה השמד – המקום יבטלהו – על ענין השמד הזה אשר יכריחוהו בו להודות לאותו איש בשליחות ושהוא נביא אמת, האם יודה האדם בזה בשביל שלא ימות ויטמעו בניו ובנותיו בגוים? . . . ויען הנשאל על זה דבר חלוש אין לו טעם. . . שמי שאומר הדבר ההוא, אפילו קיים התורה כולה בסתר ובגלוי הרי זה גוי! . . . שמי שיודה לאותו איש שהוא נביא אף על פי שהוא אנוס הרי הוא רשע ופסול מפסולי עדות דאורייתא. . . ועתה אתחיל לבאר גודל הטעות מה שנכשל בה העני הזה ומה שעשה בעצמו והוא לא ידע ואיך שחשב לעשות טובה אחת וקנה רעות רבות.

. . . ישראל שנאנסו באונס השמד ועושים מצוות בסתר איך לא יגמלם ד' על כך! ולא יהיה הפרש אצלו בין עושה מצוה או אינו עושה, בין עובד אלקים לאשר לא עבדו. רמב"ם, אגרת השמד

Someone of our generation asked a self styled scholar, a member of a community that did not experience the forced conversion, may G-d annul this [terrible decree], which was the lot of the majority of Jewish communities, regarding this forced conversion in which the [Moslems] forced them to confess that [Mohammed] was G-d's messenger and that he was a true prophet. [This is *Uj c j c f c*. the expression of faith that every Moslem makes, and is a pillar of Islam. The formula states: *la ilaha illa-llah - Muhammadun rasulu 'illah, Vjgtg"ku"pq"iqf"dwv"Cmncj0"Oqjco ogf"ku Jku"ogugpigt.*] - Is a person allowed to make this confession in order to avoid death [with the likely consequence] that his children will become assimilated amongst the non Jews? . . . The one who was asked this question responded with a feeble answer that lacked real substance . . . [and stated] that any one who made that confession, even if he [otherwise] fulfilled the entire Torah in private and public has the status of a non Jew! . . . Even if he admitted under duress that [Mohammed] was a prophet, that person is considered an evil doer whose testimony the Torah disqualified. . . . Now I will begin to explain the great [conceptual] error which caused this [intellectually] impoverished fellow to stumble and the [additional errors] which he himself unknowingly made and how he thought to accomplish a good thing [but on the contrary] created many terrible ones instead. . . . If Jews, who were forcibly converted, do *mitzvos* in private, how can it be that G-d will not grant them reward! He (referring to the self styled scholar) doesn't make any distinction between those that perform *mitzvos* and those who don't, or between someone who serves G-d and someone who doesn't! . . . **The Epistle of Forced Conversion**

#### VIII. The Crusades

A. When the saints saw that the enemy was prevailing over them, they rose up, men and women alike, and slaughtered the children, and then slaughtered one another. Some of them fell upon their swords and perished, and others were slaughtered with their own swords or knives. The righteous women hurled stones from the windows on the enemy, and the enemy threw rocks back at them. The women were struck by the stones, and their bodies and faces were completely bruised and cut. They taunted and reviled the errant ones with the name of the crucified, despicable, and abominable son of harlotry, saying: "In whom do you place your trust? In a putrid corpse!" The misled ones then approached to smash the door. - The errant ones slew all those who were inside and stripped them naked as they still quivered and writhed in their blood. "See, O L-rd, and behold, how abject I am become." Then they threw them out of the rooms, through the windows, naked, creating mounds upon mounds, heaps upon heaps, until they appeared as a high mountain. Many of the children of the Sacred Covenant were still alive when they were thus thrown, and they gestured with their fingers: "Give us water to drink." When the errant ones saw this, they asked: "Is it your desire to defile yourselves?" The victims shook their heads in refusal and gazed upward to their Father in Heaven, thus saying no, and pointed with their fingers to the Blessed Holy One, whereupon the errant ones slew them.

Such were the deeds of those that have been cited by name. As for the rest of the community, how much more did they do to attest to the Oneness of the Holy Name, and all of them fell into the hand of the L-rd. - The errant ones then began to rage tumultuously in the name of the crucified one. They raised their banner and proceeded to the remainder of the community, in the courtyard of the count's fortress. They besieged them, too and warred against them until they had taken the gatehouse of the courtyard and slew some of them as well. **Anonymous Mainz Chronicle**

B. The entire community in Regensburg was forcibly converted, for they saw that they could not be saved. When the errant ones and the rest of the mob gathered, the people of the city forced them into the river (to baptize them), and then the enemy made an evil sign over the water - vertical and horizontal - (i.e. the cross) - and defiled them all simultaneously in that river, for there was a great multitude there. They, too returned to the L-rd as soon as the enemy had left, doing great penance. For what they had done, they had done under powerful duress, being unable to withstand the enemy, and the enemy had not wished to slay them. May G-d forgive us our trespasses. **Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson**

C. It is now fitting to recount the praises of those who were forcibly converted. They risked their lives even in matters pertaining to food and drink. They slaughtered the animals they ate in accordance with Jewish ritual, extracted the forbidden fat, and inspected the meat in accordance with Rabbinic law. They did not drink prohibited wine and rarely attended church, and whenever they did go, it was under great coercion and fear, and they went with aggrieved spirits. The Gentiles themselves knew that they had not converted out of conviction but rather in fear of the errant ones, and that the Jews did not believe in the object of their reverence but remained steadfast in their reverence for the L-rd and clung firmly to the Most High G-d. In the eyes of the Gentiles, they observed the Gentile Sabbath properly; but they observed G-d's Torah clandestinely. He who speaks evil of them, it is as though he spoke thus of the Divine Countenance. **Chronicle of Solomon bar Simson**

D.

אב הרחמים שוכן מרומים ברחמיו העצומים הוא יפקוד ברחמים החסידים והישרים והתמימים קהלות הקדש שמסרו נפשם על קדושת השם, הנאהבים והנעימים בחייהם ובמותם לא נפרדו. מנשרים קלו ומאריות גברו לעשות רצון קונם וחפץ צורם. יזכרם אלקינו לטובה, עם שאר צדיקי עולם, וינקום לעינינו נקמת דם עבדיו השפוף . . . תפלה קודם מוסף

Father of compassion, Who dwells on high, in His powerful compassion may He recall with compassion the devout, the upright, and the perfect ones; the holy communities who gave their lives for the Sanctification of the Name - who were beloved and pleasant in their lifetime and in their death were not parted [from G-d]. They were quicker than eagles and stronger than lions to do their Creator's will and their Rock's desire. May our G-d remember them for good with the other righteous of the world. May He, before our eyes, exact retribution for the spilled blood of His servants . . . **Prayer before Musaf**

IX. The Great Cossack Uprising of 1648-1649

A. In the year 5408 (1648), . . . the sixteenth year of the reign of King Vladislav, there lived a Cossack in the town Czehiryń, and his name in Russian was [Bogdon] Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, while in Polish he was Chmielnicki. He was one of the officers of the hundreds (sotski) of the Cossacks. . . . In that city [of Czehiryń] lived the Jew, Zechariah Sobilenki, who was its governor and administrator. He was the nobleman's tax farmer, as was the customary occupation of most Jews in the kingdom of [Little] Russia. **For they ruled in every part of [Little] Russia**, a condition which aroused the jealousy of the peasants, and which was the cause of the massacres. . . . All the four death penalties: stoning, burning, beheading and strangling were meted out to the Jews. Many were taken by the Tartars into captivity. Women and virgins were ravished. They lay with the women in the presence of their husbands. They seized comely women as handmaids and housekeepers, some as wives and concubines. Similar atrocities were perpetrated in all the settlements through which they passed. Also, against the

Polish people, these cruelties were perpetrated, especially against priests and bishops. Thus, westward of the Dnieper several thousand Jewish persons perished and several hundred were forced to change their faith. Scrolls of the Torah were torn to pieces, and turned into boots and shoes for their feet; the straps of the *tefilin* served as laces around their feet. The leather boxes of the *tefilin* were cast into the streets. Other sacred books served to pave the streets. Some were used for kindling purposes, and others to stuff the barrels of their guns. The ears ring at the hearing of this. **Ibid. Rav Nosson Nota Hanover, Yevein HaMetzulah, Chapter IV**

B. The oppressor, Chmiel, may his name be blotted out, heard that many Jews had gathered in the holy community of Nemirov, and that they had a great deal of silver and gold with them. . . . Accordingly, Chmiel sent a leader, an enemy of the Jews, and about six hundred swordsmen with him, to attack this noble community. In addition, he wrote to the city heads to help the band. The city leaders readily responded to give them their full cooperation. This they did, not so much because of their love of the Cossacks, but because of their hatred of the Jews. And it came to pass on a Wednesday, the 20th of Sivan (June 10th, 1648), the Cossacks approached the city of Nemirov. When the Jews saw the troops from afar, their hearts trembled from fright, though they were not certain, as yet, whether they were Polish or Cossack. Nevertheless, all the Jews went with their wives and children, with their silver and gold, in the fortress, locked and barred the gates, and prepared to fight with them. What did those evil doers, the Cossacks do? They devised flags like those of the Poles, for there is no way to distinguish between the Polish and the Cossack forces except through their banners. The people of the city were fully aware of this trickery, and nevertheless called to the Jews in the fortress, "Open the gate. This is a Polish army which has come to save you from the hands of your enemies, should they come." . . . Immediately they opened the gate. No sooner had the gate been opened than the Cossacks entered with drawn swords, spears and scythes, and some only with clubs, and they killed the Jews in large numbers. Women and young girls were ravished, but some of the women and maidens jumped into the moat surrounding the fortress in order that the uncircumcised should not defile them. They drowned in the waters. Many of them who were able to swim, jumped into the water, believing that they would escape the slaughter, but the Ukrainians swam after them with their swords and their scythes, and killed them in the water. Some of the enemy shot with their guns into the water and killed them till the water became red with the blood of the slain. **Rav Nosson Nota Hanover, Yevein HaMetzulah, Chapter V**

C. The head of the yeshiva (rabbinical academy) of Nemirov was also there. His name was, Moreinu V'Rabbainu ((our master and teacher), the rabbi, Rabbi Yechiel Mechel, son of his excellency, our teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, of blessed memory. He knew the whole of Rabbinic writings by heart and was proficient in all of the worldly sciences. On the Sabbath before the catastrophe, he preached and admonished the people that if the enemy should come (G-d forbid), they should not change their faith, but rather be martyred for the sanctification of His Name. This the holy people did. He also jumped into the water, believing that he would save himself by swimming, when a Ukrainian seized him and wanted to slay him, but the scholar implored him not to kill him, for which he would compensate him with a great deal of gold and silver. The Ukrainian consented, and he led him to the house, where his gold and silver were hidden, and the Cossack released him. The Rabbi then left that place with his mother, and the two hid in a certain house all that night till the morning dawn. On the morrow, . . . the Ukrainians searched the houses, suspecting the Jews might be hidden there. The Rabbi and his mother then fled to the cemetery. Thus, should they be killed, they would receive burial. But it so happened that when they came near the cemetery, a Ukrainian shoemaker, one of the townspeople, pursued the Rabbi with club in hand and inflicted on him wounds. The Rabbi's mother pleaded with the Ukrainians

to be killed instead of the son, but the latter paid no attention and proceeded to kill first the Rabbi and then the mother, may G-d avenge their blood. Three days after the massacre, the Rabbi's wife buried him, for in the town where the slaughter took place, the majority of the women were spared, except for the old and feeble who were killed. **Ibid.**

D. Moreover a severe epidemic had broken out in the whole Kingdom of Poland. In the city of Cracow, and in other communities, in the Kingdom of Poland, in the summer of 5412 (1652) more than twenty thousand persons perished. . . . Unto the present day throughout the kingdom of Poland, there reigns the sword, famine, and a great pestilence. And these latter troubles make us forget the former. Every day the tragedy is greater than the one on the day preceding it. . . . Shall we say that we have not sinned? Behold, our iniquities testify against us. For we have sinned, and L-rd found out the iniquity of the servants. . . . Since the day when the *Bais HaMikdash* (Holy Temple) was destroyed, the righteous are seized by death for the iniquities of the generation. **Ibid.**