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# TOWARDS A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF IBN VERGA'S *SHEBET YEHUDAH*

## A Summary

This thesis is presented in five chapters beginning with the purpose of the *Shebet Yehudah* and concluding with the translation of the first seven chapters of the text from its Hebrew original into English. Originally published around 1550 in Italy, the text attempts to grapple with the persecutions of the Jewish people from a new perspective. Prior to this period, histories were recorded from a theological point of view without regard for empirical evidence. However, this trend was changing during this period, and Ibn Verga was a part of this transition.

The text was published in Hebrew and was eventually translated into German and Spanish, but an English translation was never published. Therefore the purpose of this thesis was to begin translating the text into English and to identify the underlying themes and their examples.

The thesis is divided into chapters based upon the desire to increase one's understanding of the subject matter. It begins with the author, then the history surrounding the focus of the book, a socio-political perspective on the first seven chapters of the book, and ends with the translation.

In order to complete this task, it became necessary to examine the nature of historical writing, the history of the author, the history of the Sephardim until the Expulsion in 1492, as well as the nature of political theory. This was accomplished with the use of a wide variety of reference texts, period analyses, and books on historical and political theory. In addition, there was a use of dictionaries and individual's with an expertise in Hebrew translation.

TOWARDS A SOCIO-POLITICAL ANALYSIS OF IBN VERGA'S  
*SHEBET YEHUDAH*

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Requirements for Ordination

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## CHAPTER I

### *AN INTRODUCTION*

It was just over a year ago that I approached my teacher, Dr. Martin Cohen, about the matter of writing a thesis. Having completed six semesters of study with him, I was certain that we would be able to find a topic that would be mutually satisfying and an amazing learning experience. Prior to this occasion, I had little opportunity to study and explore the history of the Sephardim. The experience was both eye opening and enlightening. Over the course of this project, I can attest to the certainty that Dr. Cohen and I have reached our initial goals.

From the beginning of this process, I knew that I had acquired myself not only a rabbi, but also a friend and mentor. He has provided a guiding vision and hand towards increased scholarship along with his endless caring and commitment to the individual student. Truly, this tremendous learning experience was everything that it promised be, because Dr. Cohen was there every step of the way. Thank for being my Rabbi, my teacher and my friend. Also, thank you to Dr. Shelby Cohen who was there for us both.

In addition, to the efforts of Dr. Cohen, I would also like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Henry Resnick, who provided a great deal of Hebraic support. He helped to quiet my fears as the unfamiliar Hebrew text became overwhelming at times. Henry is a true asset to the Hebrew Union College community.

Beyond the scope of the College, there were numerous other supporters. Without my family and friends, I doubt that I would have finished this project with my heart filled with joy and sense of accomplishment.

## CHAPTER II

*IBN VERGA AND THE IMPORTANCE OF HIS WORK*

In approximately 1550 the *Shebet Yehudah*, a history of Jewish persecutions and religious disputations, was published in Italy. The work has been primarily attributed to the Jewish historiographer, Solomon Ibn Verga of Seville, Spain. However, it should be noted that some have suggested that this work began with Judah Ibn Verga, another Spanish historian who was also a Kabbalist, a mathematician and an astronomer. It has also been thought that he was the father or grandfather of Solomon Ibn Verga. It is from this perspective that it becomes possible that his chronicle became the basis for the *Shebet Yehudah*.

Solomon Ibn Verga resided in Spain during the Inquisition and expulsion which he observed and experienced. During his lifetime, he was a well-respected member of the Castilian community. Beginning in 1487, Ibn Verga became the official representative of the Jewish community to the members of the government. His earliest authorized task of note was the collection of funds for ransom to free Jewish captives following the conquest of Malaga.

Following the expulsion from Spain, Ibn Verga settled in Lisbon in 1492. Then, in 1497, facing a severe anti-Jewish decree was forced to convert and accept baptism. Nine years later, Ibn Verga was faced with the pogroms in Lisbon until the borders of Portugal were opened and the Jews were permitted to emigrate. It is believed that he traveled to Italy, at that time, where he completed his work on the *Shebet Yehudah*.

It was in this work that Ibn Verga chronicled the persecutions of the Jews from the

destruction of the First Temple until the events of his own time. His book marked the start of a new era in Jewish culture with his Jewish perspective on Jewish suffering. He examined the economic and social factors pertaining to the Jewish and non-Jewish communities of Spain prior to 1492 and afterwards. He based his information on empirical evidence and not the prevalent medieval theological position of his time.

The *Shebet Yehudah* was a great success when it was published because it was an historical book, where the persecutions were detailed and given an historical flavor. The underlying premise was of Jewish existence coupled with their tragic experience. In turn, the book was read by both leaders and laymen throughout the Jewish world, although it was originally intended for readers in positions of leadership. It has said, that it eventually became required reading every day with the exception of Shabbat, which explains its widespread popularity and influence.

## CHAPTER III

### *A HISTORY OF SPANISH JEWRY*

Throughout Spanish history, the nation and its people have struggled with its political and religious ideologies. As the monarchies and the power has shifted, so have the tides of tolerance of various groups of people. This historical pattern, has had its greatest influence upon the Jewish people living within certain polities on the Iberian Peninsula. Dating back as far as the third century C.E., they have both flourished and perished in an ever-changing political climate. However, the Expulsion of the Jews in 1492, marked the beginning of a watershed period in Jewish history, the effects of which could be felt for generations to come.

Under Visigothic rule (587-711), the Jewish communities of Spain enjoyed little freedom and prosperity. From one monarch to the next, they were subjected to a variety of restrictions and mandates that resulted in further persecution. Often the Jews were forced to convert or became impoverished or even enslaved by Christian masters. However, despite the law, many Jews found support within the Roman Catholic clergy and lay leadership, including the encouragement of the return of those Jews who were exiled and to reverse Jewish conversions to Christianity. Yet, the course of history was changing as well as the status of the Jew. It began to change with the arrival of the Muslim invaders who welcomed the assistance of the suppressed Jewish communities as they conquered cities and entire regions throughout Spain.

Throughout the Muslim period (711-1492), all of Muslim Iberia flourished, including the Jewish communities. They developed a new genre of society that was



predominantly urban and was based upon political, economic and social rationalization. In turn, there was a considerable degree of increased wealth. It was during this Golden Age that the Jewish communities in Muslim Iberia acquired a new status. They were viewed as protected people, with a great deal of physical and emotional comfort. They made great strides in social, intellectual, economic and political circles. Their influence, power and respect grew tremendously. In fact, the cities of Lucena, Granada, and Tarragona were regarded as "Jewish cities" by Arab geographers. Their influence also moved beyond their immediate surroundings and reached out to communities throughout the Jewish world.

Simultaneously, the events of the Christian Reconquest were unfolding, beginning around 722, and the new face of Christian Spain was emerging. This period lasted until 1492 as well, with the annexation of Granada. As the Christian kings of the Reconquest began to resettle and develop their newly acquired regions, they began to develop a new social order. The new aristocracy was comprised of military leaders and the average soldier became the everyday citizen. In turn, their perspectives on the Jewish community shifted as well. The Jewish communities of Reconquista Iberia were smaller in size, when compared to those in Muslim Iberia, but they flourished as a sophisticated, rationalistic, and acculturated group. It is of no surprise that the Jews became quasi-members of the aristocracy based upon their individual knowledge and skills. Instead of viewing the Jews as a threat, they were now seen as a useful and necessary group in the society. Their contribution to the scope of Jewish creativity warranted them a special place in history. It was during the Silver Age of Iberian Jewry that remarkable strides in Jewish literature

were made. In addition to their creative contributions, they also made great strides within the general society. They enjoyed a great deal of professional, social and cultural contact with their non-Jewish neighbors. In many cases, they lived amongst the populace, in unrestricted areas. Sometimes, Jews were viewed by the courts as being near equals to the Christian citizens in the community. However, the Jews were always dependent upon the generosity of their Christian benefactors.

With the rise of the Spanish King Alfonso I the status of the Jew continued to rise. It was at this moment in history, Jews were seen as courtiers, wielding a considerable amount of power and authority throughout the kingdom. In addition to their positions of considerable importance, it is estimated that nearly one-third of the land throughout the kingdom was owned by the Jews.

As the rule of King Alfonso I and his successors expanded from one region to the next, the Jews were invited to stay and were granted religious freedom. The Jews maintained their positions within the community and enjoyed internal communal autonomy and external security. This meant that Jewish communities were considered to be independent political entities with administrative and judicial independency. Their only contact with the Crown was the regular payment of taxes to the royal treasury.

Unfortunately, the positive feeling towards the Jewish communities was not felt throughout the kingdom. In a variety of municipalities, there were attempts to create legislation that would adversely impact the prosperity of the wealthy Jews and limit their growth. To their dismay, their attempts to place limitations upon the Jews were unsuccessful because they were not able to usurp any of the power, in these matters, from

the King himself. But the dissatisfaction of the poorer members of the community remained and simmered. It would not belong until their voices would be heard again, with greater impact.

In 1348, King Alfonso X applied his new code of laws, *Las Siete Partidas*, which specifically defined the royal policy towards the Jews. Under this set of laws, the Jews were granted complete Jewish freedom. However, this was based upon the condition that the Jews did not, in any way, attack Christianity. In turn, there were numerous provisions set forth within the code to prevent the occurrence of blood libels, restrictions on the numbers and sizes of synagogues within a given community, and Jews and Christians were not permitted to reside in the same household. As a result, the Jewish communities became more insulated. Many set up their own court systems and were given permission by the Crown to try all types of criminals and to even exercise the death penalty. It was rare for the king to interfere with the internal lives of the Jewish communities under his rule.

Unfortunately, with the dawning of the thirteenth century, the status of the Jew fell into jeopardy. The climate was changing rapidly and it was not long before the kingdoms of Spain followed the example of Louis IX of France. The kingdom of Aragon was the first to begin a full-scale attempt to convert the Jews to Christianity. Then in 1250, the first blood libel occurred in Saragossa. Soon afterwards, Nahmanides, the most popular rabbi of his day, was tried in Spain for being outspoken. While he was acquitted, he was forced to leave Spain and, according to legend he eventually settled in Jerusalem.

The simmering dissatisfaction of many citizens of Iberia began to boil and the

ruling class wanted to maintain their position of power. In an attempt to divert the attention of the masses, they attempted to shift their focus from their anger to their disdain for the Jews. Reviving the never forgotten notion that the Jews were no longer a positive constituency were a threat to their survival. Clearly, the social tensions were rising and the positions of the Jews of Aragon were dissipating. By the time James II came to power in 1291, the Jewish courtiers had been dismissed but the king would not assist in any efforts to convert the Jews. However, conversionist policies developed throughout the region, especially during and after the civil war in Castile. Then, the Black Death gave rise to the further destruction of Spanish communities and anti-Jewish sentiment. By 1354, many Jewish leaders from around the Catalanian region convened in Barcelona in hope of creating a strategy to strengthen their communities' positions. This led them to send a delegation to Pope Clement VI for assistance. With regard to the internal affairs of the Jewish communities, they were forced to reorganize and establish a new Jewish authority. As a result, the Council of Thirty was created to dispense *takkanot* and set taxes. The smaller communities set up similar but less complex systems. Yet, their attempts to organize and protect their communities were not prepared for the violence that would ensue against them. Beginning in 1378, Ferran Martinez furthered the conversionist policies already in place with his anti-Jewish preaching.

It was around 1391 that all of the tension and resentment of the Jews of Spain erupted into great violence. The prosperous and well established Jewish communities, at that time, were terrorized by numerous pogroms. The violence began in Castile in March and by the time that summer had arrived, it had spread to Aragon and the Balearic Isles as

well. It could be said that the preaching of Martinez fueled the fire of hatred that blazed through these regions of Iberia. By the time that the violence reached its end, the lives of many had been lost and their property destroyed. Eventually, much of this violence came to a halt by virtue of royal orders. In response to the violence, it is of no surprise that massive numbers of conversions took place following the violence.

Following the violence, conversion became the official policies of both Castile and Aragon. This was most evident from the preaching of Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419). His work culminated with the Disputation of Tortosa (1414-1415) authorized in 1413 by Benedict XIII. The purpose of the Disputation was to further stimulate the conversion of Jews to Christianity.

This prolonged conflict between the Jews and non-Jews of Spain would eventually culminate with the complete destruction of Spanish Jewish life. While many of the Jews of Iberia had already converted to Christianity, it was believed that many of the New Christians or Conversos were still participating in Jewish life or ritual. Therefore, many believed that it was necessary to acquire permission to establish an Inquisition so that they would be able to "clean the blood" of the New Christians. Such permission was first granted by Pope Nicholas V in 1451. However, it was never implemented. Permission was sought again in 1478, was granted, and the Inquisition was established approximately two years later.

While an Inquisition was viewed as a religious institution that served a specific purpose and protect the Church, it also served a socio-political purpose. In a society where Christianity is the one aspect of life that unifies the masses, and where Judaism has

been identified as the enemy of the Church, the Inquisition would identify all New Christians as Jews and place them into a category of other. Now that they could be identified by definition, they can be viewed as the most dangerous members of society because they are really a Jew in Christian clothing. In turn, the ruling party maintains their position and they have achieved their political objective.

It was in March of 1492 that King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued their edict of expulsion. Their decision followed their consultation with advisors, especially Thomas de Torquemada, who was the Grand Inquisitor. The edict ordered, on pain of death, that all Jews had to leave the territories belonging to the King and Queen within four months time. They were further ordered that they could only depart with their personal belongings, while all metals, including silver and gold, along with any precious gems or national coinage had to be left behind.

While the empirical evidence surrounding the Inquisition and Expulsion of 1492 exists, there are also many stories about what transpired between the king and some of the wealthier members of the Jewish communities. It is told that the wealthy and powerful Jews of Spain did not leave the country without first having tried to persuade the Crown to rescind their edict. Supposedly, Don Abraham Seneor and Don Isaac Abravanel, two wealthy and respected Jewish members of the Court approached the King with the hope of coming to a point of understanding, securing the future of the Jewish communities of Spain. It is told that the two courtiers met with the King in order to discuss the details of a bribe. After all, they had been heavily involved with the finances of the king and were well aware of his greed. It is estimated that they had offered up to 300,000 ducats in

return for the suspension of the edict. To their dismay, their bribe was rejected after Torquemada had stormed into the meeting and counseled the King to expel the Jews. It is more probable that Abravanel and Seneor were able to delay the publication of the edict and had offered Ferdinand a large sum of money. However the offer was ultimately rejected by the King because the expulsion had been a joint decision between himself and the Queen. Besides, if Ferdinand was as money driven as the Jewish courtiers believed, he saw the political and economic gains of expulsion outweighing any bribe that they could have offered.

Regardless of what may or may not have transpired during those last few months, it is certain the Jews were forced out of the region, leaving behind a legacy of great achievement. The Inquisition and expulsion had little to do with material wealth and everything to do with the desire to maintain a position of power. In the end, the edict was published throughout Spain around May 1, 1492 and approximately 100,000 Jews were expelled from the territories by the end of July of that year.

## CHAPTER IV

*Shebet Yehudah: A Political Perspective*

Beginning in the first chapter of his book, Ibn Verga attempts to place Jewish suffering throughout the course of history into a new perspective. The publication of his book was read by a crushed and devastated Jewish populace, or at least the leadership of their communities, which was desperately searching for answers and explanations for their long history of suffering. He attempts to provide the people with an assessment of the societal conditions that have fostered Jewish hatred over the course of history and to articulate a rationale for the cycle of Jewish suffering. In addition, he had hoped that the book would imbue the people with renewed confidence in themselves, in Judaism, and in God. It also would foster increased self-awareness and provide the Jews with a defense against the false Christian accusations of the day.

In response to this apparent need, the book addresses multiple themes throughout the chapters. In turn, it becomes necessary to identify those themes, their usage, and their examples that are drawn from the spectrum of Jewish history. Over the course of this chapter, the following themes will be examined: the use of ancient history to reflect contemporary problems, the nature of the Jewish people, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews, an empirical explanation of Jewish suffering, how kings have shown respect for Jews, and that seemingly miraculous events are the result of Jewish work.

The first theme focuses on the book's use of ancient history to reflect contemporary problems. The book begins with a detailed account of the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 CE. The first chapter, "The First Destruction," focuses on the events that led up to the



destruction of the Jewish community of Jerusalem from a historical perspective. Thus Ibn Verga removes the commonly used veil of theological explanation and replaces it with empirical data.

The source of the Jewish conflict with Rome had little if anything to do with their religious beliefs, according to Ibn Verga. Rather, the area was considered to be another territory to conquer and add to the dominion of the Roman Empire. However, during Marc Anthony's mission to conquer the area, he became distracted by his love for Cleopatra and was eventually removed from power. Surprisingly, in this situation, the Jews were falsely accused by their enemies for the internal turmoil within the Roman Empire. The text explains that "some of the enemies of the Jews arose and said that the Queen of Egypt looked favorably towards the Jews and that the Jews had encouraged Marc Anthony and the Queen of Egypt to get married, so that Anthony would desist from making war upon them." While internal difficulties of Rome created a situation that was temporarily advantageous for the Jews because it delayed the siege upon them. This was due to the internal difficulties of Rome. Although they took precedence over their campaign to conquer the area they did not protect the Romans from the anger of Augustus Caesar. Once he had dealt with the internal matters of his reign, he was able to return his attention towards his campaign.

To the surprise of the Roman army, the Jews were not weak or fearful or unable to fight in battle. Rather, they were fierce and proved to be a worthy opponent. The text states, "Let us desist from our war with the Jews because we are not fighting with men but with lions and panthers." Confronted with the possibility of losing their battle and

bringing shame upon themselves, they regrouped in order to strengthen their forces and prepare to fight until their own deaths for the sake of their own honor.

After the Romans had initially conquered Jerusalem, they had appointed a prince to rule over the area. However, the Jews were not finished fighting for their independence and they killed the prince. In response, the Romans set out to fight the Jews for a second time. This time, they were determined to be prepared and not underestimate the strength and power of the Jews again. The text indicates that for the second battle, the Emperor, "prepared ramparts which he had not prepared at first because he had not thought much of the Jews at that time."

It is through the ancient example that it becomes clear that Jews were not always viewed as weak members of society who were ill suited for war. Rather, they were a fierce group, capable of defending themselves against a mighty nation. While they were not victorious against the Romans, their valiant fight illustrates the point that the common stereotypes about the Jews were not altogether accurate.

It is with the second theme about the nature of the Jewish group that Ibn Verga addresses the specifics of the stereotypes that pervaded the popular thought of his time. It was commonly believed that Jews were haughty, vain, pushy, unscrupulous, showy, and cowardly. In addition, people believed that the wealth of the Jews was directly related to the national treasury and that the Jews had gone to great lengths to separate themselves from the rest of the population because they believed that they were more lofty. All of these stereotypes are addressed throughout the chapters of the book. In many cases, Ibn Verga exaggerates these traits in order to prove his belief that they were unfounded and

wholly ridiculous.

The first example that is addressed in the body of the text is found in the Fourth Apostasy. The king has commanded that all Jews must convert to Christianity or fall on his sword. The Jews go to the gate of the king to plead their case and the king responds by addressing them as a "foolish and heartless people.....Oh, foolish people, I haven't come to argue with you because I know that you always use Jewish arguments." Clearly the king has some distinct beliefs about the Jews. The king addresses them according to his understanding of the people and he speaks of Jewish arguments that he believes are being employed to deceive or trick him into changing his mind. Yet, the Jews are not discouraged and they proceed to make their plea before the king. They argue before the king that their "salvation lies in the keeping of our Law which was enjoined upon us. You, master of our body and ruler over our possession; but God gave us our souls and will at the end of days restore them to us." Thus, they go to great lengths in their attempts to illustrate to the king that they are a separate group that does not fully fall under the dominion of the king and that they are compelled to follow another set of laws that take precedence over the laws of the king.

Then in the Sixth Apostasy, Ibn Verga provides a contemporary example of the strength of the Jews and that they were capable of saving themselves. It was during the Shepherds' Rebellion that the majority of Jewish communities were being destroyed because the people were unable to defend themselves. However that was not always the case. In reality there were communities who were quite able and successfully fought off the invasion of the Shepherds and survived. The text states that the shepherds "came to

the Jewish community in Pamplona. About three parsangs away, in a place called Monreal, there were many Jews, who beat the shepherds thoroughly and they left." This Jewish victory led to the further support of lord Don Alfonso who was ultimately responsible for bringing an end to this rebellion.

At the end of the Sixth Apostasy, there is a note about the response of the wealthier Jewish communities who were untouched by the Shepherds' Rebellion and chose to give of themselves in order to support those communities that had barely survived. It reads, "I heard that in the city of Tolaivo there were rich Jews, who, when they saw the misery of the Jews impoverished from these events, gave liberally of their possession and gathered wheat and oil in their storehouses to give to the poor for three years. And when the important Jews who were in Spain and Germany saw the kindness done to their brothers elsewhere, they did the same thing following the tradition of the extremely merciful people of our faith who do the right thing by their brethren at the time of their distress and hardship." What appears to be an example of generosity, caring, and compassion amongst a large group of people, is not always viewed as positive. To the eye of the non-Jew, this was just another example of wealthy Jews helping their own without regard for those outside of the Jewish community who might be suffering. Rather than finding appreciation for the generous gesture, they became resentful of what it could imply with regard to themselves. In the end, the support of one Jewish community by another could be twisted in order to prove certain ideas about the true nature of the Jewish people.

It is in the Seventh Apostasy that Thomas remarks about the Jewish stereotypes of

his day and their ridiculous nature. He states, "I have never seen any smart person who has been angry with the Jews. And there is actually no one who hates the Jews except the low mob and they have one reason, namely that the Jew is haughty and always seeks to rule over others..." He continues by explaining that this is a misunderstanding of the people because, "they do not realize that they are exiles and servants who are pushed from people to people."

Thomas continues with his explanation "But, indeed, as long as there was no basis to envy them, they were beloved. But now the Jew has risen to prominence and if a Jew has two hundred gold pieces, immediately he dresses in silks and his children in embroidered clothes which princes do not do who have an income of a thousand times as much income per year.....As a result of the haughtiness of the Jews, they have come into the city of Toledo to hold positions of importance..." It is not surprising that people would grow to resent a group who arrived poor, amassed a great deal of wealth, and enjoyed the use of their monies to purchase finery and property. Without a doubt, this was an exaggeration of the reality in order to better illustrate the point.

However, the discussion regarding the nature of the Jew does not end there. The conversation between the king and Thomas continues by addressing the matter of Jews separating themselves from the rest of society. The king notes that Jews will not eat and drink with a Christian. He attests that nothing could bring a society closer together than the act of breaking bread together and the Jews will not permit this. Thomas explains that it has nothing to do with the Christian notion that Jews perceive them as dirty. Rather he blames the perspective of the Talmudic scholars, that is, the rabbis, who have placed

unnecessary restrictions on the Jewish people and preventing them from joining their neighbors at the dinner table.

The text is filled with a never-ending array of examples of the perceptions of the Jewish people that are continuously being explained by the patient Thomas. However, some of the larger examples were mentioned above.

The next theme that is addressed by Ibn Verga is the relationship that existed between the Jews and the non-Jews. In times of peace and widespread prosperity, there were few if any difficulties between the two groups. Yet, this was not the case when times became difficult or there was a feeling of unrest throughout the land. The explanation occurs over and over again that the Jew turns to his non-Jewish neighbor for support and safety and that his trust and life are often betrayed.

These examples are best illustrated during in the Sixth Apostasy which focuses on the period of the Shepherds' Rebellion. It was during this time of great turmoil that the Jews turned to their powerful non-Jewish neighbors for protection, were promised a great deal of safety in return for financial compensation and sometimes they held their word. This common example followed the example provided by the Jews of Cordelle. It came to pass that the Shepherds "went on to Cordelle and there they killed all of the Jews they found except for a few who gave all of their property to the princes in return for his promise to hide them in their palaces." Unfortunately, the plan did not always work out the way the Jews had envisioned.

Such is the example from the city of Carcassonne. "Now the count was a kind man. He informed all the Jews in the vicinity that they should venture forth only under

guard and when they came together he would send a knight, who was a relative of his, to escort them to the city of Carcassonne, which was a fortified city where they could be safe. He entrusted all of the Jews who came to the knight and admonished him to protect them with his life for they were not guilty of any capital crime. But the villagers conspired with the knight and he betrayed the Jews. The villagers arose at night and killed all of them."

A similar example is told from the city of Lues. "In the village of Lues, there were three hundred Jews who were very rich and entrusted their property to one nobleman in return for his provision of cavalry to bring them safely to the Kingdom of Aragon. But when they were departing the people of the city fell on them and all were killed."

It is through all three of these examples that one can see that there were varying levels of concern for the Jews and the depths of the individual relationships. In the first example, it is clear that the Jews are being assisted because it is believed that they have not committed a capital crime and therefore they should not have incurred this type of persecution. In the second example, a knight was entrusted to protect the Jews. Unfortunately, it appears as though his allegiance was unknown and his actions proved that he had little reason to protect the people entrusted to him. In the last example, it is clear that money was exchanged for protection. In the end, this agreement was not honored and the Jews died at the hands of the masses.

The fourth theme identified in the book is concerned with the prolonged suffering of the Jewish people. Up until the writing of this book, Jewish suffering was best

explained through a theological understanding of history. Basically, this meant that the Jews suffered because God was punishing them because they had committed a sin against God. However, Ibn Verga, through the discourse of his characters, attempts to find and articulate a "natural" explanation for Jewish suffering. In other words, he attempted to look at Jewish history from an empirical perspective in an attempt to address and understand the long and tumultuous road of Jewish suffering.

He begins his search for understanding with a variety of small comments sprinkled throughout the text. In them, he alludes to theological understanding that was well known at the time. One example can be found at the end of the First Destruction when he states, "The change of climate and food together with their sin, caused all of them to die there and they were buried in Rome." Up until this time, it was difficult to believe that the Jews who had been exiled to Rome died there because of a change in climate and diet. Rather, their suffering and death had to be the result of God's punishment for their sins.

It is in the context of the king's prolonged discussion with Thomas that he attempts to understand the suffering of the Jews in an attempt to make his own royal decisions regarding the Jews. He has asked Thomas for the "reason for the misfortune of Jews from days of old" along with an explanation for the "fall of the Jews based upon natural causes or as a punishment because we have seen and have heard of many people who have transgressed and sinned to a greater extent and were not punished."

The Seventh Apostasy opens with a plethora of examples of human transgression without any punishment being levied upon the transgressors. The historical examples are vast. They illustrate the improbable likelihood that only the Jews were punished for their



transgressions. It is only towards the end of the chapter that Thomas turns his attention to the natural causes for the fall of the Jewish people.

Thomas begins his explanation by providing the reader with the metaphor of a tree. "It is similar to a tree, which when its height becomes excessive, it becomes the cause of its downfall because the wind controls it excessively. The same thing is true with the Jews: the spirit of haughtiness comes over them and sense of enmity that is within the haughty brings them down." He continues by simplifying his explanation stating that "because they became very proud, one against the other, until their hearts were separated from one another to a great degree." This, in essence was the cause of their downfall.

Thomas explains that the Jews, would reach a point at which one group would possess the desire to rule over the other. However, in order to accomplish this goal they would have to turn to an outside source in order to obtain the necessary support to succeed. It was through the act of bringing in outsiders that their weaknesses were learned and their position revealed, ultimately at a disadvantage. "And with every one of them turning in his own way in order to provoke his neighbor, their strength was weakened in this way and their great numbers, great like a multitude of gnats proved to be of no help or consequence to them." The text does not end with a mere explanation. Rather, it provides ten different examples over the course of ancient Jewish history to illustrate the example of one Jew turning on his neighbor for the sake of ~~immerging~~ from the situation as the victor. The list begins with a rebellion against the ~~monarchy~~ of the House of David and ends with the destruction of the Second Temple.

For the first time, Jews were given an opportunity to understand their own destruction from an historical point of view. Unlike the notion that they are continually being punished for their transgressions against God, their behavior was being critically examined, providing new insight. If the fall of the people was due to the people, it was possible to remedy the situation and to improve in the future. If not, one could say that they were doomed forever and that life could be better if they had explored a different theological path. The point Verga is trying to make is that conversion was not the solution to the suffering that confronted the Jews.

It is through the fifth theme that Verga illustrates that in many cases the ruling kings felt and bestowed respect upon the Jews within their dominion. Not every king who ruled on the Iberian Peninsula disliked the Jews. In fact, there were many who held the Jews in high regard. Over the course of time, Jews held many notable positions within the communities at large as well as the royal courts themselves. When compared to the status of Jews in other parts of Europe during the same time period, the Jews of Iberia were often treated with greater dignity and respect.

It was during the events of the Shepherds' Rebellion that the hearts of many of the kings became known. At one point the Jews sent emissaries to the king of France with the hope that he might intercede on their behalf because he was known as a kind king. True to his reputation, the king sent messengers to every city in his region, commanding that they save the remaining Jews. In addition, he ordered that the priests should arise and challenge the shepherds because they were going against their own faith.

Then there was the king of Aragon who worked very hard to rescue the Jews

within his dominion. He sent knights and guards to each of his cities in an attempt to save those communities. His son, Don Alfonso, worked towards his fathers goals. He went out and captured forty shepherds and hanged them on a tree in accordance with his father's decree. It was at that point that the King of France issued his own decree which called for the death of any person who was affiliated with the shepherds group. In the end, it was a knight, under the order of Don Alfonso who ended the rebellion and the mass killing of the Jews by killing the leader of the shepherds.

In addition to the king's affection for the Jews in general, one should note that some of the kings had personal feelings about various individual Jews. Such was the case with the famous Jew Isaac Abravanel. In the Seventh Apostasy, it becomes clear that the opinion of Abravanel is highly valued and that the king is anxious to meet with him personally. The king is quoted as having said that "I am very happy at your words and even more at the words of Abravanel. And you would make me all the happier if you could persuade him to come to us, to the courts of our greatness." The king then refers to Abravanel a second time during which he eludes to a reward for bringing Abravanel to the court, "Perhaps you will get this reward from me but on condition you bring before me that Abravanel, if he happens to be in our city, and if not, write to him in our name." It is without doubt, that Abravanel was a highly respected member of society, in all circles.

However, beyond the respect of the individual Jew, was the acknowledgement of many monarchs that a forced religion was of no value and that forced conversion was never a consideration in response to the demands of the populace. This belief is well

illustrated by the king of the Seventh Apostasy. The king says to Thomas that he is "far from the ideology of the kings who preceded [him] who sought to compel the Jews to the faith of Jesus and afterwards were unsuccessful. Because in the heart of hearts, these people are Jews in all considerations.....And the reason that I have is the following: the Jews who experienced those high and holy stations (at Mount Sinai) and those miracles and the fire from Heaven at the time of the giving of the Law fixed that image which became ingrained in them." To this statement Thomas agreed and remarked that "So I say that it is not possible to remove their faith from the heart of Jews except through fire because it was given by fire." The king then responded to Thomas by reminding him that only God can give and take by fire and not mankind.

The final theme to be addressed is the matter of the miraculous events in history. While the masses might have perceived events to be of a miraculous nature, they were more often the result of the work of an individual or a community.

It is during the reading of the Sixth Apostasy that the reader comes across the notion of an event that was relayed as a miracle. The event surrounded the miraculous freedom of ten wagons filled with shepherds in the city of Toulouse. They had been captured by the cavalry and had been brought to the city in order to face the Count of Toulouse. However, "the priests of the city arose and freed the shepherds. In the morning, they cried out, 'Look at the miracle that has happened to the shepherds! The Savior has freed them and this demonstrates the truth of their beliefs.' The whole city was astonished and made every effort to save the shepherds from the hands of the Count of Toulouse who was trying to kill them but was powerless to do so."

While this is referred to as a miraculous event, it undermines its own miracle because the details of the event are given. On the other hand, there is reference to a miracle that occurred in the days of Ancient Israel. It is told in the Seventh Apostasy that "when a king came and wished to make peace with them, they gave him 'all of the silver and gold which was in the Temple' in return for his desisting from war against them. In the second year, another king came and the record says that they gave him all of the silver and gold that was in the Temple. It does not say that they gave him the rest of the silver and gold that was in the Temple." If this was the case, it is highly unlikely that a great miracle had occurred and that all of the gold and silver had been replaced by some unknown factor. Rather, it means that the Jews worked with great diligence to replace what had already existed in the Temple prior to the first king.

And such was the case with the Jews throughout history. When they entered a new land as the poor they would work hard and achieve great wealth, over all, in a short period of time. Hence, the Jews were disliked, because they had not been able to amass the same amount of wealth in a similar period of time.

It is through these themes that Ibn Verga was able to explore a variety of ideas. Through his survey of history he was able to portray the persecutions of the Jews from different times and reflect upon their contemporary relevance. He was also able to depict the extent of Jewish tragedy through the examination of varying decrees. And most importantly he could relay the heroic deeds that led to the miraculous rescue of several communities.

Through a socio-political lens it is not difficult to understand why it was easy to

isolate the Jews and find fault with them as a group and a threat to society. On the whole, Jews were considered to be intelligent and learned. They showed an incredible amount of solidarity when threatened or marred. They were charitable and compassionate towards one another and they were loyal to their religion in the face of danger.

As a result, it was often easier to find fault with the Jews and bring false charges against them in order to maintain power and control. And while many of the accusations might sound ridiculous, they were known by many through stories that had been passed from one generation to the next. In turn, they were easily filtered out of the mainstream society, making them an easy target for hatred and blame for personal and societal misfortune.

Yet, it was Ibn Verga's goal to redefine the destiny of the Jews by assessing the societal conditions that led to Jewish hatred and providing a new philosophy for Jewish suffering. He wanted to emphasize that the Jewish people were not suffering because of transgressions against God. Rather, there was a way to understand the events of their times that did not require them to blame themselves for the misfortunes bestowed upon them by the surrounding society.

## CHAPTER V

*A TRANSLATION OF CHAPTERS 1-7**Preface:*

The scepter of Judah, authored by the wise Sephardic man, Dr. Rabbi Solomon Ibn Verga. It will contain the many and terrible sufferings that happened to Israel in the Diaspora, in the lands of foreign nations; including many disputations concerning religion; the manner by which the princes are established, the innumerable miracles which have happened to our people in the Ottoman Empire, and the form and arrangement of the Temple.

*Introduction:*

Solomon Ibn Verga of blessed memory said: At the end of the book composed by my forbearer, the great sage, Don Judah ibn Verga of blessed memory, I found a record of some of the persecutions and disabling legislation which were visited upon the people Israel in foreign lands. I copied them so the children of Israel will see and hear and will repent and will implore the God of compassion that He may forgive their sins for what they have undergone and say enough to their troubles. I have called this book the *Shebet Yehudah*, that is the *Rod of Judah*. Judah was the ruler at the very beginning and he saw more of the wrathful staff of God. And the prophet Isaiah (3:5) has said: "Jerusalem has stumbled and Judah has fallen."

*The First Destruction:*

The following happened in the days of the Roman Emperor Marc Anthony. Marc Anthony determined to attack Jerusalem with a powerful army. He was joined by one of

the kings of Greece whose name was Cassius. When the Emperor approached Jerusalem, he heard that the Queen of Egypt, whose name was Cleopatra, had become a widow. She was regarded to be extraordinarily beautiful. Naturally, the Emperor fell madly in love with her. So he sent emissaries to Egypt to ask for her hand in marriage. She was pleased and agreed to take him as her husband on condition that he first divorce his wife who was in Rome. And so he did. But, the divorced wife happened to be the sister of the Emperor Octavian. But when the wise men, the counselors of the Romans saw this indignity, they agreed to remove the imperial crown from Anthony and they placed it on the head of Augustus. Afterwards, some of the enemies of the Jews arose and said that the Queen of Egypt looked favorably towards the Jews and that the Jews had encouraged Marc Anthony and the Queen of Egypt to get married, so that Anthony would desist from making war upon them. When the Romans heard this, they advised the Emperor Augustus to attack Jerusalem and take vengeance first upon Anthony and then upon the Jews. So Augustus attacked with a powerful army from all of the corners of the earth, because the Romans at that time had dominion from one end of the world to the other.

The war between Anthony and Augustus dragged on. Finally, Augustus was victorious and Anthony fled. Then Augustus killed Cleopatra along with her two sons from her first husband.

After that, Augustus turned against the Jews. But the Jews displayed great feats of strength and killed many of Caesar's soldiers. Then the Emperor spoke to his advisors saying "Let us desist from our war with the Jews because we are not fighting with men but with lions and panthers." His advisors responded, "How can we go back to Rome



with such shame upon us. Therefore let us prepare for battle with all of our strength, and if we die, our glory will endure forever." So they fought valiantly in their war. They demolished the walls of Jerusalem and they captured a great deal of booty.

After this, the Emperor left a great prince to rule over the Jews in the name of Rome while he returned to his country with great honor. But within a year, the Jews rebelled against the rule of Rome and killed that prince. When the Emperor heard this, he was greatly angered and gathered an army twice the original size because he had experienced the power of the Jews and their courage. He prepared ramparts which he had not prepared at first because he had not thought much of the Jews at that time. The new war lasted for a year but in the end, the Emperor was victorious and he slaughtered as many Jews as there are sands on the seashore. He finally raised his hands to heaven and said, "Master of the World, do not blame me for having spilled so much blood for it was the Jews who brought this evil upon themselves." After this, he exiled all of the leaders of the Jews and brought them to Rome and, there also, the hand of God was heavy upon them. The change of climate and food together with their sin, caused all of them to die there and they were buried in Rome.

So it is written in the Chronicles of the Kings of Aragon.

### *The Second Apostasy:*

In the days of Ben Sira, there was a great apostasy whose cause I was unable to determine. But I found a record that 30,000 people abandoned the religion of Moses our teacher of blessed memory, while those who remained steadfast to our God were burned

at the stake. And this Ben Sira is Joshua the son of Sira, the grandson of Joshua ben Jehozedek the High Priest. He is known by the Christians as Josephus Sirach as the Church father Jerome indicates. This sage composed a book for Christians called Ecclesiasticus which book they have included in their Writ because of its great wisdom and significance.

*The Third Apostasy:*

In the year 4004, before the Muslims had prevailed over the Persians, the Persians had a change of heart with regard to the Jews. Prior to this time, they loved the Jews and showed them honor because at that time, there were still Jews notable for their wisdom and their honor comparable in their (blank) to the men of Jerusalem prior to its destruction. The king tried to save the Jews but he was unable to do so because the mob was very great and he was afraid that the people might rebel against him because the wars of the Muslims against the Persians had already begun. And, therefore, when he heard them cry out that they were arising for the exaltation of their faith, the king reluctantly bowed to their intentions. He imprisoned three leaders of Israel whose names were Amemar the son of Mar Yanuka, Mesharshiah, and Honi, and heads of the Diaspora, and subjected them to harsh punishment to get them to abandon their faith and thereby encourage their people to do the same. But, may they rest in peace, they withstood the test and were faithful to the great God. And when the King saw that he could not influence them, he ordered them to be killed. Then he ordered that all of the Jewish leaders be thrown into prison, and there they endured distress and deprivation for a long time until their skin dried on their bones. And when they could no longer bear it, many of them

converted. But from that time on, the king of Persia declined precipitously. The Muslim group attacked, beat and conquered them, occupying the entire Persian Empire.

Now, the Muslim king was a gracious king, as always happens, for all their kings are benevolent and generous. So this king summoned the Jews and spoke kindly to them, with promises that they could practice the religion they chose because a forced religion is of no value. Even the Persian inhabitants of the land confessed and stated that their downfall was due to their treatment of the Jews. From that time on they left the Jews alone.

So it is found in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Persia, which was brought to the King of Spain according to the Christian custom because the Christians wanted to learn the events of history in order to benefit from their experience. This is a testimony to their importance and good judgment.

#### *The Fourth Apostasy:*

In the year 4872, the sword of ben Humrad (Ibn Tumart) went forth and he made a proclamation throughout his kingdom that whosoever did not accept his faith would die by the sword and his money would be confiscated and be given to the royal treasury. Then all of the Jews arose, they and their children and their children's offspring and they went to the gate of the king, near the opening of the gate where they cried out and said, "O King, save us!" The king answered and said, "You foolish and heartless people! Have I called you to my faith for any other reason then to save you so that you would not be consigned to Hell." The Jews answered, "Our salvation lies in the keeping of our Law which was enjoined upon us. You, master of our body and ruler over our possessions; but

God gave us our souls and will at the end of days restore them to us. And you our king are innocent of this on your throne." The king answered, "Oh, foolish people, I haven't come to argue with you because I know that you always use Jewish arguments. My simple reason was that you change your religion and if not, here is the sword." The Jews answered, "Don't be angry, O our lord, for you are our king and we are with you, and if we do not do your will, you can banish us to another land. But what kind of vengeance is it for us to leave our land and our families and go to a people we do not know." The king answered, "I have no desire to allow my servants to serve another king."

And when the Jews realized what the king was up to, they went to the princes and they begged that they should talk to the king to have the king subdue his anger, take their money, and leave them in their faith. So they did, but it did no good. And because of the great number of hardships that resulted, many communities of Jews left the faith of Moses our teacher of blessed memory. But within a month, that king suddenly died and was replaced by his son. Now his son was very much afraid that his father had died because of his sin against the Jews. So he called all of the Jews who had converted under duress, made all kinds of promises to them, and intimated to them that he would not care if they believed whatever they believed. So many of them returned to their faith but many, afraid that he told them a trick to find out what was in their hearts, remained outside of the faith for many days.

#### *The Fifth Apostasy:*

In the great city of Granada, there was a false charge leveled against Rabbi Joseph Halevy, and he was put to death and the entire community with him, numbering more

than 1500 houses. And whoever did not see the honor and success of that Jewish community has not seen any beauty in this world at all because these people were great in wisdom and in reverence. So, people far and wide mourned the death of all of these people because of their importance. And also because of fear, lest a similar decree and fate pass over them. This happened on the Ninth day of Tevet and at a time when the Megillat Ta'anit, that is the Scroll of Fasting, had an entry but did not indicate the reason for this entry. It appears that through some prophecy they had in mind this later date. So Rabbi Joseph Halevy was hanged for the sanctification of God's name because the King of Spain wished to punish him for not converting out of his faith, and since he was unable to prevail in this way, he ordered that Joseph Halevy be hanged.

*The Sixth Apostasy:*

This deals with the persecution of the Shepherds, the likes of which there never has been nor will there ever be again. It has many conflicting versions and what was written in the Book of Chronicles is how it was. In the city of Agen, a lad arose and gathered many of the people around him and said that the image of a dove appeared to him daily, sometimes on his shoulder and sometimes on his head, and spoke to him in the spirit of prophecy. And when he reached out to take it, it transformed into a beautiful young maiden who said, "Young lad, behold I will make you a shepherd in the land and you will defeat in battle after battle. This is the sign which you will see before you, for on your arms these words will be written. There were many who testified that they saw this and others testified that they saw the form of the cross of the Savior etched on his arm, while others say that since this young man was standing by a fountain, they heard these

things but they saw no image. When the people heard their words, they went to the young man and bowed down to him and prostrated themselves. They lifted him up and made him their prince and holy leader. But it was only the shepherds who followed the lad from place to place and in those regions; they were as numerous as the sand. The fame of the young man grew and grew and from every kingdom, people came by the thousands and tens of thousands. In a short time, thirty thousand shepherds had gathered around him and set out to go to the city of Granada and from there to every Muslim kingdom. And while they were deliberating on this, one of them said, "This is not a good idea, for how can we fight with the Muslims who are so well trained in battle and are so many while we are but a few? And they have military weapons while we do not possess even the smallest daggers. If you agree, let us attack the Jews because they are weak and feeble and there is no one to help them. We can topple them with our bare hands alone, and once we have fortified ourselves with the booty and riches of the Jews which is great, we will purchase weapons. We will get help from many sides and then we can go fight against the Muslims. Our victory would be assured.

During these deliberations, a Jewish tailor happened upon them. This poor fellow did not know what they were deliberating about and he mocked everything about them. With wild abandon, the shepherds jumped on him and made his flesh like a sieve so that through this one man's error anger spread against all of the Jews and the shepherds determined to extirpate the name of the Jews from the world. Others wrote that the reason for their hatred was a dispute that one of the Jews had with them and when the shepherds saw that the Jews were getting the better of them with one of the Jews, they

killed him. From there, the evil spread to all of the places, wherever the shepherds had power.

Then the Jews sent emissaries to the King of France, who was sorely displeased, for he was a kind king. So he sent messengers to every city to spare the people who were left. He also informed the priests that they should challenge the shepherds and make them desist from their evil intention for they were going against their faith by their actions. And if their intentions were honorable, they should come before him because he would then lead them into battle. The shepherds mocked these words and they laughed over them.

Then the poor Jews quickly contacted the Pope who decreed an anathema in all places commanding them to rise up against the shepherds. But, his threat was to no avail, for the shepherds were many and they were joined by the villagers. Also, many embittered people saw this as an opportune time to attack the Jews. So the shepherds rose up and killed all of the Jews in that place and not even one escaped. From there they went on to Cordelle and there they killed all of the Jews they found except for a few who gave their property to the princes in return for his promise to hide them in their palaces. And when this became known to the Count of Toulouse, he sent horsemen with orders to make every effort to capture some of the shepherds and arrest them and bring them before him to Toulouse. So the cavalry went and captured many of them, taking ten wagons full and reached Toulouse at night. Then the priests of the city arose and freed the shepherds. In the morning, they cried out, "Look at the miracle that has happened to the shepherds! The Savior has freed them and this demonstrates the truth of their beliefs." The whole

city was astonished and made every effort to save the shepherds from the hands of the Count of Toulouse who was trying to kill them but was powerless to do so.

Now, the Jews who had fled to the Tower of Narbonne without knowing what happened afterwards, said, "Henceforth there is no reason to fear since the shepherds have already fallen." So they hastened out of the tower. But the shepherds gathered against them on the road, and while the Jews made every effort to oppose them, the villagers went out to help the shepherds and the Jews lost a hundred and fifty people. When the Count of Toulouse heard this, he himself went out against the shepherds and learned that they had already gathered a large number of people and he did not want to fight. Instead, he sought to rebuke them. They then tried to attack him and he was compelled to retreat and go back home.

Now the count was a kind man. He informed all the Jews in the vicinity that they should venture forth only under guard and when they came together he would send a knight, who was a relative of his, to escort them to the city of Carcassonne which was a fortified city where they could be safe. He entrusted all of the Jews who came to the knight and admonished him to protect them with his life for they were not guilty of any capital crime. But the villagers conspired with the knight and he betrayed the Jews. The villagers arose at night and killed all of them.

This great conflagration burned in all of the cities of England, Bourdelais, Castel Sarracen, Charzin, Aegean. And in all of those places, they kept on murdering. And from there to the city of Bigorre, then to Condonne, leaving no survivors. These are the large cities: the small cities are far too numerous to mention. Ultimately, a hundred and



twenty communities were destroyed by the shepherds. In Castel Sarracen, where many Jews had gathered together for safety, the shepherds tried to break down the doors. And when the Jews saw that they no longer had any means of escape, they said, "It is better for us to kill ourselves rather than fall at the hands of the shepherds." They drew lots between them. And two hundred killed one another. The two that were left threw themselves down from the tower.

When the shepherds became stronger, they returned to the city of Toulouse. The Count went out, graciously pleading with them, "You are my brothers and fellow worshipers, not like the sinning Jews, but it seems to me that you have no right to kill them, but only to force them over to the religion of our Savior, the true religion. Furthermore, the decree referred only to an attack against the Muslims." The shepherds intimated that if the Jews of Toulouse would accept the religion of Jesus, they would spare them. Then all of the Jews converted and the only one who remained faithful to the religion was one woman who hid herself in the palace of a nobleman of her acquaintance. In the city of Gascon, all the Jews were killed except for twenty who fled to the city of Lerida. In the village of Lues, there were three hundred Jews who were very rich and entrusted their property to one nobleman in return for his provision of cavalry to bring them safely to the kingdom of Aragon. But when they were departing the people of the city fell on them and all were killed.

And in the Kingdom of Aragon the Jews were in extremely great difficulty. All of them assembled together into every fortified city. Then they sent word to the Pope, who ordered all of the bishops under his rule to pronounce an excommunication against the

shepherds so that they should stop doing what they were doing. But it was to no avail. The bishop of Toulouse, who was the son of the King of Aragon, helped the congregation at Lerida, and they were saved. But the shepherds went through all the Kingdom of Aragon and nearly everyone perished. However, the King of Aragon was a very righteous king and took great pains to rescue the Jewish communities of his realm. He placed knights and guards in every province and even so, he was not very successful. However, the lord named Don Alfonso, who was the son of the King of Aragon, set himself to do the right thing. He went to the town of Huseca and arrested forty of the shepherds' followers and hanged them on a tree on the command of his father. He captured them on a mountain which he had surrounded, and hanged them and removed them from his entire kingdom. The King of France also made a proclamation throughout his kingdom that anyone from the shepherd's group who was found there would be put to death. So, the shepherds left the Kingdom of Aragon, and they went to the Kingdom of Navarre. They came to the Jewish community in Pamplona. About three parsangs away, in a place called Monreal, there were many Jews, who beat the shepherds thoroughly and they left. After this, the lord Don Alfonso told one of his great knights that if he could mount an offensive against the shepherds and defeat the young man, he would reward him financially and would raise him over all of his other princes. Said the knight, "How can I go against the intention of God?" So Don Alfonso said to him, "If that is the intention of God, he will rescue the young man from you, but if it is a lie you can kill him." So the knight went off to battle. He prepared himself thoroughly to attack the place where the young shepherd was located. He shot an arrow at the young shepherd and he fell to the

ground. And when the other shepherds so that their hero had died, they fled. But five hundred men who did not know about the death of the young shepherd went to the town of Tolaivo. When the knight heard this, he went out and killed an indeterminate large number of them until the rest scattered hither and yon and became fugitives of one kingdom to another. And when the princes and the bishops saw that the shepherds were weak they attacked them on the strength of the Pope's excommunication in a short period of time the shepherds came to an end because those who had not fallen smitten by the sword fell smitten with the plague. Not one of them was left, but what they had already done could not be repaired. I found all of this in the history of the Kings of Spain and I copied it from the vulgar tongue to the Hebrew tongue.

I heard that in the city of Tolaivo there were rich Jews, who, when they saw the misery of the Jews impoverished from these events, gave liberally of their possessions and gathered wheat and oil in their storehouses to give to the poor for three years. And when the important Jews who were in Spain and Germany saw the kindness done to their brothers elsewhere, they did the same thing following the tradition of the extremely merciful people of our faith who do the right thing by their brethren at the time of their distress and hardship. May God reward their work.

*The Seventh Apostasy:*

The substance of the discussion which took place between the noble and pious King Alfonso of Spain with Thomas, the most distinguished sage.

Says the King to Thomas, "Welcome to the courts of our greatness. I would like you, kindly, to lead me to an explanation and prevent me from shedding blood or harming

the Jewish people because six days ago, a servant of our Savior came to my palace and he said in public that Jews could not celebrate a festival called in Hebrew, Pesach, except with the blood of a Christian. And although I saw in that man signs of stupidity more than signs of wisdom, what can I do if the people believed him and they insisted on justice and persisted in having me do something. Indeed, I almost look like a foreigner or non-Christian to them or even a Jew because I would not take vengeance on the Jews simply because this stupidity became fixed in their confused minds. And although such a matter is absolutely senseless, I wanted to know how to answer the fools, because they constitute a large number of people and I could not easily dismiss them. Now I know that you know the religion of the Jews in its traditions and its customs. Therefore you would also know if there was any foundation in a matter such as this or in a book that is called by them the Talmud, which is an explanation of the Bible, especially since you are familiar with them, as you have the reputation for being, and you have seen first hand. And if indeed there is a sin like that, I shall expel them from my land. But if it is a lie, I shall make it my business to save them because they are my servants.

Secondly, let me know the reason for the misfortune of Jews from days of old and don't tell me what interest I have in such matters of the Jews. I have a real reason and one of these days, I will tell it to you. The truth is, I cannot explain the fall of the Jews either through natural causes or as punishment because we have seen and have heard of many people who have transgressed and sinned to a greater extent and were not punished. On the contrary, they wound up greatly succeeding. For example, in the days of the Roman Emperor, people were serving the planet Saturn (Sebazius) and the Roman king

destroyed his temple and he built a temple to Lucifer and took the priests of Sebazius and immolated them upon the altar of Lucifer. Now, Lucifer is Venus. Yet, the Roman king and his people were greatly successful. Even today reliable historians tell us that there is in the far distant islands of the sea a worship of Venus. There a temple has been built for her and there is an idol who is lying on his back and he has the form of a male member, and they bring a young girl and she lies upon it and they gather together the drops of blood that come down and they make a cake from it and whosoever eats from it is regarded as holy and the young girl, herself can no longer be married to anyone but is hired out for prostitution to anyone who comes. And everything that the young woman earns is divided. Half goes to her upkeep and half to the ministers in that temple and she goes for a high price because everyone who has intercourse with her is regarded as holy forever.

And next to that island there is an idol worship which involves seven rats and seven bats. We have heard that people eat the dirt of the earth and yet at no time did any king or prince conquer them.

And after the Roman king, there came another king in Rome, who destroyed the altar to Lucifer and raised a temple to the planet Saturn. And yet we find that the Romans ruled from sea to sea and from the river Euphrates to the ends of the earth. And they conquered places which no one had previously conquered and they dwelled in Germany and Burgundy. They are the great people who are in the world.

So we have found in the dwellers of the Rhine, that they were worshipers of the moon. And the same is true with the people of Carpathia and the people of Croatia and

the people of Bohemia were worshipers of the sun. While the Calbian were worshipers of fire. And there are some in the islands of the sea who bow down to the element of the earth and it follows, naturally, that they should place themselves beneath the surface of the earth so that their god would come up to them. And in former times, there were places in the lands of the Chaldeans where people would bow down to hens. Some of them had the idol in the form of a badger and some had idols of the form of the donkey and mule and horse all together. And there were some who bowed down to the first person they met in the morning when they left their house. Yet, all of them were greatly successful.

And in the great city of Rome, whose inhabitants were very clever, there arose another king whose name was Janus, who was successful in his wars and the people regarded him to be a god and called out to him 'O, God of gods.' Yet he was greatly successful.

Now, if indeed it was true that the Jews were punished for their sins, why was it a punishment of exile? Because we do not find any father who exiles the son because he has sinned; rather the father rebukes the son and he remains in his house and with his substance. But (not so) the Jews, who are called 'Children of God' as is written in the book of the Bible to the point where our Savior came, of whom David said, 'You are my son.'

I shall also ask you the following question so you can tell me if Jews have sinned, what was the sin of the holy place which is in Jerusalem? It is agreed by all religions that that place is holy. The Jews say that is the place where God began the creation of the

world, and that it is the place for the reception of prayers for every living being. The Muslims call that place the Gate of Heaven. The Christians say that at that point souls go up to heaven and that it the place of prophecy for prophets and that there our Savior was born as David says, 'You will send, O God, a rod of your strength from Zion from the womb of the dawn.'

And if it is said that the Jews did not fall because of punishment but because of a natural cause, let us begin by focusing on the prerequisites for war which are four. First, sharpness and understanding of the tactics and their implementation. It is recognized by all groups that the Jews are extremely able and more clever than all peoples. If so, they did not fall in wars because they had any lack of these qualities. Second, what is needed is might and strength. Titus, their enemy testifies to their strength. In the process he says that three young brothers held one gate of Jerusalem open for three years, morning and night, against the entire Roman encampment in order to provoke it, finally Titus became ashamed. He gathered all his people and rebuked them with great determination. Nevertheless, many people from his camp were felled while the young men, in the middle of the gate, went and closed the doors and there was no one in Titus' camp who could stop this closing. Third, wealth is needed in order to provide food for the camp. There were Jews who liberally gave wheat for the Jewish camp for two years. And from what I can deduce regarding the extent of their wealth, when a king came and wished to make peace with them, they gave him "all of the silver and gold which was in the Temple" in return for his desisting from war against them. In the second year, another king came and the record says that they gave him all of the silver and gold which was in

the Temple. It does not say that they gave him the rest of the silver and gold that was in the Temple. This is clearly stated in the books of their kings which makes it appear that in one year they made up for all that was missing from the previous year. If this were the case in Spain, the people would not be able to lift their heads in opposition to the Jews for seven full years. Fourth, is the multitude of the people. Nicholas di Lira writes that there were among the Jews six hundred thousand swordsmen and from Israel, there were eight hundred thousand arrow shooters and spear throwers. A multitude like this was not found in all of the kingdoms of the nations put together. Therefore for a people like this, I was unable to find any natural explanation for their downfall."

Thomas answers, "O Noble and Holy King, I have heard very amazing things today and I am greatly surprised how they could have entered into the heart of someone as knowledgeable and wise as you something so far from reason that there can be nothing stranger. Because, even if one says that they don't believe in it, why does our Lord raise a question like this? Even the inhabitants of the city, being Spaniards who are most learned and clever among the nations, believe these old wives' tales created while they were spinning by the light of the moon and the false charges of wicked people who sought an excuse to compensate for their deficiencies through the suffering of others. I have not found any explanation for all of this save that there is in all of this a hatred of the Jewish faith. Therefore these people seek to throw down the Jews which is this lowly people, wherever they find them. They do not believe what they say. They are moved by what they have in their heart and they have no rational insight into this procedure. But the redeemer of (these people) the Jews is strong. Not because of the love he had from them



as he had in days of old, but because it is the nature of God to watch over the lowliest of his creatures and he watches over them more than he does of something that is highly placed. And the meaning of this concept is clear namely that which is lowly and humble is much closer to destruction and since the compassion of God is over all of his creatures, he does not want any of the species he has created to perish, even the species of the ant or the fly, all the more so, the religious Jew. To the further question of the king, I say, that whatever food is not customary for the human being, when it is brought before him, he dislikes it and his nature finds it loathsome. If people say to a Christian that he should eat the flesh of a dog or a rat or a cat, he would spit it out and flee from them just as the Jew flees from eating pig or fat. And if a person loathes and feels dirty in what he eats, why should a person eat hens or chickens who eat worms that are in dung heaps and why should a person eat all kinds of creeping things. As far as fat, that is what is most prized in a living being yet the Jew does not eat it because he is not accustomed to eating it. And all the more so, another anomaly and that is that a Jew should have the effrontery that he should wish to take the blood of a man while he is living in his city and his family which if it gets a hold of him will tear him to pieces. Another anomaly, is with the regard to the matter of killing, Jews are very much warned against it in their religion.

And what shall we say about the fear that resides in the hearts of Jews because if in a street there happened to be a hundred Jews and a small Christian child should come and say 'Rise up against the Jew!' all of them would flee. And if your judges bring out a man for capital punishment, all of them flee from that place because their nature is such that they cannot endure so looking at an execution even of their enemies. And that is

because God has cursed them as the Bible says 'I shall set your fear in your hearts and the sound of a rustling leaf shall put you to flight.' So in the case of a Jew, we see that he does not consume the blood of any living being and that is the case even from fish. Because the Talmudic scholars have said that fish blood is not really blood, they still forbade it's drinking and it is very repugnant in the eyes of Jews because they are not accustomed to it, even if a Jew sees many people consuming blood. This is all the more the case that a Jew should loathe the blood of a human being because he has not seen any people consuming it. Our king will recognize this matter because if a Jew eats from a liver and the blood from the liver comes out from his teeth, he cannot eat until he cleans his teeth completely. And it is known that the blood of others is more loathsome to a human being than his own blood and a Jew even loathes his own blood because he is not used to it. As far as the Jews being ordered that they should not slaughter with a defective knife, its purpose is only to save them from consuming the blood because there is a fear that the defectiveness causes the blood that goes forth to go back and protect the heart which is the principal organ and then it does not go out anymore. Therefore the living being which the non-Jew slaughters stench more quickly than the living being that a Jew slaughters because the slaughtering by a non-Jew does not drain all of the blood of the living being and the stench results from the blood. This is quite evident and so I have experienced."

The King answered, "I am very angry at you, Thomas, because you have understood from me that I believe what people invent falsely against the Jews and a matter like this is regarded as shameful. With regard to what I have asked from you, I ask

that in order for me to know the reasons that you have given to answer this foolish people of mine and to put their minds to rest. And with regard to what you have said namely, how the killing of a human being is forbidden to them one can answer that this is true for Jew to Jew but how about if a Jew kills a Christian, the Christian is not regarded by him to be a human being. Add to this, from what I have heard the Talmudic Rabbis to say, namely that if an ox of a Jew kills the ox of a non-Jew, the Jew is free from obligation."

Thomas answers, "My lord and king, I once had a dispute over this with a prince from the children of Abravanel who had come from Seville, the land of his birth, and he said that anybody who understands the Hebrew language will not find this to be a problem because there is a difference between the language of the *nokhri* or the language of the Christian or the member of another people because the *nokhri* means someone who has made himself strange to his maker and does not believe in the fundamentals of the faith while the Christian, since he believes in the creation of the world and miracles and providence, is not called a *nokhri*."

Said the King, "And if we do believe in the Trinity, how can we be regarded as *nokhri* in the eyes of Jews?"

Said Thomas, "A great sage once showed me one of the explanations of the early worthies of more than six hundred years ago who said the following: anyone who believes in God, and creation, and prophecy, and punishment and reward is a religious person. And Christians believe all of that. And if they believe in the Trinity, that is not because of any denial of the unity of God because they say, that the Trinity, indeed, is a unity. And therefore they are to be called religious people. And we do not have the right,

according to our faith, to kill them or damage them financially as long as we do not have any kingdom or control and we are subjected to their rule. And if they do not perform the *mitzvot*, it is not any fault of theirs because they were not ordered to do so. Only the people who left Egypt and most of the *mitzvot* are dependent on this principle.

Furthermore, that same Abravanel said to me, that when it is said that there is no difference between the Christian and *nokhri* there is still another very clear response which the Talmudic scholars give. They say that stealing from a *goy* is forbidden and they made this prohibition even stricter than stealing from a Jew. If so, how can we say that an ox of a Jew who killed an ox of a *nokhri* makes a Jew exempt from payment. Therefore, whether we like it or not, it is necessary that we say either one of two different things. Either there is a difference between a *nokhri* and a *goy* or with regard to the matter of oxen, they said that a Jew is inculpable because it is a question of damage from money to money and the Jew does not understand the nature of guarding the flocks as a *goy* does because a *goy* is a regular herdsman. Furthermore, even if we say that the damage inflicted by an ox of a Jew renders the Jew inculpable, it does not permit that the Jew hurt the *goy* personally or steal from him. All the more that it should be permitted to kill him because even if this had been permitted, it would have been necessary to state it because this would have been an enormous novelty and innovation."

Said the King, "I am very happy at your words and even more at the words of Abravanel. And you would make me all the happier if you could persuade him to come to us, to the courts of our greatness. But now I have a complaint against my people, because, since Jews have the righteous laws and statutes and very important moral

principles such as liberality, and righteousness, and compassion and being a smart people, why should they hate them? And certainly, someone who loves truth should not do this. With regard to the compassion of Jews, a great preacher once spoke before me and said that whoever calls a Jew a dog, is making a great mistake. Rather, he should call a Jew a pig because there is within him is the characteristic of a pig and not the characteristic of a dog. And we see this in experience because when someone strikes a dog, all dogs follow after him to bite him more the damage that he has inflicted. But in the case of a pig, when people throw a rock at one of them and he cries out, then all of the pigs cry out with him. And so the Jew, if he comes into our Church and steals the chalice, immediately all of the Jews hurry to his help. The tailor goes to a prince whom he knows well and the goldsmith goes to the duke. And so all of them go to the people whom they know and some go with gifts of all kinds, others with entreaties and they do not stop until they have extracted the Jew from his plight. And this actions makes it worthy to be regarded among the highest moral activities."

The answer of Thomas: "I have never seen any smart person who has been angry with the Jews. And there is actually no one who hates Jews except the low mob and they have one reason, namely that the Jew is haughty and always seeks to rule over others and they do not realize that they are exiles and servants who are pushed from people to people. On the contrary, they like to show themselves to be lords and masters. Therefore the people are jealous of them and the sage said that the anger that results from enmity has no remedy and you, our Lord, has seen evidence of this. Because when the Jews came to the kingdom of our Lord they came like servants and exiles dressed in rags and

they remained for many years without dressing in finery and the people showed them no rancor. But if in those days, you had heard that people were leveling against them the accusation of the consumption of Christian blood, if this had really happened in those days, it would have been written in the chronicles of the kings of Spain in accordance with their proper and good procedure in order to take example from it for the future. But, indeed, as long as there was no basis to envy them, they were beloved. But now the Jew has risen to prominence and if a Jew has two hundred gold pieces, immediately he dresses in silks and his children in embroidered clothes which princes do not do who have an income of a thousand times as much income per year. Therefore, people complain against the Jews in order that the king may be persuaded to expel them from the kingdom. As a result of the haughtiness of the Jews, they have come into the city of Toledo to hold positions of importance to the point where they would beat up on Christians and where their great spokes people would say, whoever strikes a Christian should be judged by Jewish law. Concerning them, Solomon said: For three things the earth trembles, the first being because of a servant who rules. The second reason for their being hated is that when the Jews came to the kingdom of our lord they were poor and the Christians were rich, but now the opposite is true because the Jew is smart and shrewd to attain his end and also because Jews have become very rich through usury and you, our lord, will see that two-thirds of the lands and estates which are in Spain are all in the hands of Jews."

Said the King, "Those reasons are sufficient to induce enmity, but even though the Jew has an explanation for what he is doing, who compels the Christian to borrow from the Jew at usurious interest.

I have even thought of another complaint, that is the Jews' distancing themselves from eating and drinking with a Christian. For there is nothing that brings distant people together more as when they eat regularly one with the other. There is even a place in the distant isles where oaths are taken only on bread which people eat together. I swear by our Savior who enthroned me that once I was mean enough to destroy the seed of the Jewish people or to expel them because I heard that if a creeping thing fell into a glass of wine that he was drinking, that they throw out the creeping thing and drink the wine. However, if one of us touched that glass, they spill the wine, because apparently in their eyes, we are regarded as an unclean people."

The answer of Thomas: "The Jews are not to blame for this, only their Talmudic scholars, who have placed iron chains on their legs and have made things difficult in their eyes to the point that they have no room to live because where the Bible says that those who eat their fat and those who drink their wine, they do not believe that this deals exclusively with the sacrifices and liquid offerings which they used to make to the sun and to the moon before Jesus came into the world. Nevertheless, the Talmudic scholars came and said that any wine that is poured out to any divine service outside of the place of the Jewish sanctuary is forbidden. And they established further restrictions to the point where that even though people did not know for certain that it was poured out for such a purpose, nevertheless it is forbidden whenever there is doubt."

Said the King, "Now you have said that the fault lies with the Talmudic scholars, but I say that the only people to be blamed are those who listen to their words. Nevertheless, I now recognize that in the matter of wine, Jews are acting on the basis of

their faith.”

Said Thomas, “That is the case, without a doubt, and it once happened in the presence of the king, your father, for he said to a Jewish doctor that he had, ‘I have heard that we are unclean in your eyes. Therefore you take pains when we touch your wine. May God help you!’ The doctor said, ‘You, our Lord, are sick and my only interest is the quest for your health. Let them bring water to wash the feet of my Lord because that would be helpful and then I will answer your question.’ After the doctor had washed the feet of the king, he drank the water. Said the king, ‘Now, you have answered my question.’ The princes said, ‘We do not understand.’ Said the doctor, ‘Which is more dirty, the water that we have used to wash the feet of a human being or what he has touched with his hands or with his mouth. If it was just a question of uncleanness, how would I have drunk the water of the washing?’” Said to the King Alfonso, “The doctor did well and without any doubt he is one of the smartest of the Jews.”

Said the King to Thomas, “What advice do you give to employ on the Jews that they do not perish in the midst of my people?”

Thomas answers, “My advice is that you should proclaim throughout your kingdom that all properties that fall to Jews because of usury should be returned to their owners. This should be according to the opinions of the judges of the land. Furthermore, that no Jew should dress in silk and, furthermore, they should wear a red badge so that the people will recognize that they are Jews.”

So the King answered, “Your advice is good and proper and I am not surprised. But how can their Torah permit them to steal with regard to usury?”



So Thomas says, "Far be it that their Torah permits this to them. On the other hand, Jews are compassionate people and they created an interpretation for their benefit because the Bible says 'You may lend at interest to a *nokhri*.' But the *nokhri* means somebody who doesn't have any faith at all. And it says, 'But to your brother, you should not lend at any interest.' And we (Christians) are brothers with Jews because this is what the prophet Malachi says, 'Is not Esau a brother to Jacob?' And they, the Christians, acknowledge this brotherhood when they say 'So has said your brother Israel.'"

So the King says, "How far is this explanation from what I have heard! Because there is among the Jews, a sect in Egypt who say that the words mean that you may even lend at interest to a Jew, referring to lending only to a blood brother."

While the king was dealing with this subject, some men came before him and said that they had found a corpse in the house of a Jew and they killed the one who was responsible for his murder.

Said the king to Thomas, "You answer those fools that I am afraid that my anger is going to come over them."

So Thomas responded in accordance with everything that the king had told him. And he rebuked them severely. And after he had finished he said, "The king certainly knows the disease of stupidity that has overtaken you. And he knows that you have a point because the wicked Jews have taken your money and your property. And he has already ordered that they should return your property to you and anyone who has lent you money at heavy interest should return it. He has also ordered that they should not dress in silk or in your garments. And the recognition of all of these punishments should be

enough for your purposes. So you should not seek in any way what would be a reproach to you and you should not go after vain things so that you should be ensnared by them." Then the entire people fell upon their faces and said "May our lord the king live who loves justice."

Said the king, "You are my people, you are my children. I swear by the sacrifice of our Messiah that you shall not receive any damages so long as you explain to me fully what happened to the corpse." So the people said, "How can we speak and justify ourselves when our lord is wise like the angel of God and he knows our pain? For Jews have devoured our money and through high interest have even taken our cattle to the point where we do not have the wherewithal to plow our fields. We have therefore asked whether or not our lord can banish them from his kingdom." The king said, "According to this, the Jews did not kill the Christian, but you killed him and you deserve to be brought to trial." So the people said, "Far be it from us, our lord, we did find a corpse in the street of the city at night and we asked the watchman of our district to bring it to the cemetery. But we tossed it into the house of a Jew and there are three elders of the city who will serve as our witnesses." So the elders came before the king and he dismissed them pursuant upon his oath. The king was very happy because he saw with his own eyes that what they were alleging against the Jews was pure falsehood. And he ordered that this should be written in the Book of Chronicles. And Thomas was also very happy because his mind had reached the truth of the matter.

So the king said to Thomas, "You have come to enlighten my eyes and you will therefore draw a great reward from God in the world to come." And Thomas says, "Oh

would that I could receive a reward from you like that in this world." So the king said, "Let's hurry back to the rest of the questions. Perhaps you will get this reward from me but on condition you bring before me that Abravanel, if he happens to be in our city, and if not, write to him in our name."

So Thomas answered, "Our lord will be happy to speak with him especially since he is also of royal descent."

So the king said, "That's a falsehood, because according to what we have seen, the entire royal line of Judah was cut off when Nebuchadnezzar came upon them because he was afraid lest the people become restive with the royal seed." So Thomas answered, "Let it be known to our lord that just as when Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem, powerful kings came to help him because they were afraid of him because he was ruling mightily over the creatures of the world and also because there was a hatred of Jews in their religion. But, at their head came King Ispahan after whose name the Kingdom of Spain is called and his son in law, who was with him, who was called Pyrrhus, from the Kingdom's of Greece. And this Pyrrhus and Ispahan destroyed and humbled the Jewish people with all of their strength and might and they are the ones who conquered Jerusalem. When King Nebuchadnezzar saw how they had helped him, he gave them part of the booty and the captivity in accordance with the practice of kings at that time.

Now our lord also knows that in Jerusalem that there were three sections. From north to south and from the wall of the city that was to the west was the first section. There dwelt all of the artisans, and at their heads were the spicehandlers because they were necessary for the work of the Temple. And the king said about them, 'Oh you who

dwelling with mortars. From the first to the second section dwelling, all scholars and merchants because the scholars need merchants more than the merchants need scholars and that is simply because the merchant does not appreciate a lack of wisdom whereas a wise man does understand a lack of money. But from the second partition to the third were dwelling all of the royal seed, the family of David and the priests who were ministering at the altar. And when Jerusalem was divided among those kings, Nebuchadnezzar took the first two sections and all of the people round about and in other provinces and he brought them to Persia and Media. But the third section he gave to Pyrrhus and Ispahan. And this Pyrrhus took ships and brought all of his captives to ancient Spain, that is Andalusia, and to the town of Toledo. From there they scattered because they were many and the land had difficulty holding them. So some of the royal seed went to Seville, and from there they went to Granada. And at the time of the destruction of the Second Temple, there was an emperor in Rome who was ruling over the entire world. He took 40,000 houses of the tribe of Judah from Jerusalem and from the towns nearby and 10,000 from the tribe of Benjamin and from the priests and he sent them to Spain, which was under his dominion in those days. But most of the tribe of Benjamin and the priests went to France, and with them a few from the children of Judah, so that all of the remaining Jews who were in your kingdom were from the royal seed, and at least the majority of them from the tribe of Judah. So how can it be amazing to our lord if we find a family that is related to David?"

So the King said, "Things which you have shown to me I have never heard. And if I had known your family, I would have said that they are from the seed of Jews, because I

have seen that you are such a good spokesman for them."

So Thomas answered, "Great and holy King, you have insulted me to the point beyond all insult."

So the King said, "I have said to you that you do not belong to them. But if I had said that you are descended from them and you are a Christian now, how can this be a reproach to you? It is known generally that there is not among any peoples who can claim an origin, a descent and stock that are as clear as these poor Jews. For our ancestors, the mighty kings, prided themselves that they were from the seed of Goths and some of the Spaniards said that the gods were from the seed of Gad who was the son of the patriarch Jacob, one of whom went to Rome and received the religion of Jesus and was very successful and eventually became the head of all of the counselors who are called consuls. And after that he attained the royal crown and from him came the family of the Goths. But when you investigate the other peoples, you will not be able to find from what stock they came.

In the case of the Romans who ruled over all of the world to the dark mountains, there is some doubt from what people they are. The historian Sallust wrote that they are from the family of the Trojans. Virgil wrote that they are from the families of the Greeks. And others write that they are from the descendants of Ramulus. But from the time that the Caesars came to the world the family trees became mixed up because, at first, the throne of the Caesars was in Rome and then it was moved to Constantinople and they are the children of Rome. Then it came back through Constantine Caesar and there it was established through Constantine Caesar to the point where today the Greeks are called

Romans after the name of Rome. After that came the Frenchmen who said that the stock of the Romans was not known and that the French were from the stock of King Elipha and they brought the royal crown to France thought the great King Charlemagne. The Germans came and said that there was no truer stock than theirs and they made a war and they brought the royal crown to Germany through Antonius Caesar. But neither of them knows the real origin of their stock. So how should this be surprising, for even in our faith, the family of our Savior is not known because the Apostle Matthew connects him to the husband of Mary, the man called Joseph, and he says that Joseph was from the royal seed. But Luke says that he was not from the royal seed, and we believe that Joseph did not know Mary either before the birth of Jesus or after that but only the spirit of God. If so, how can we connect Jesus to David and say that Obed begat Jesse and Jesse begat David and David begat Jesus?"

So Thomas answered, "Oh our Lord, our King, Mary is the one who is connected to David. All the more so because there is no blemish in our faith when we say that there was no connection between Jesus and human flesh, but that he was with the great God and his spirit."

The King said, "That is what I believe and I commend my soul to him. But my intention was only to say that there is no clear root in families. But in the case of those poor Jews, their stock is clear. And this is what the great prophet Balaam said, namely, that the Hebrew people will not be counted among the nations and he thought of it as a sign of reproach. But, indeed, it is a sign of honor but because since they were not mixed with the peoples at large, their stock and origin is known. As it is said, 'Who can count

the dust of Jacob?"

So Thomas turned to the princes and said, "There is no crown like the crowns of kings. Behold our lord the king has spoken favorably about Jews more times than I have succeeded and there is no one who can say to him what he has just said to me."

So the King answered, "The things which I have said to you are in the way of truth and joy. Why should you turn them around to appropriate? Now it is fitting that we should leave these matters and go to more essential matters. And so I ask you, since you have said in your words that the *mitzvot* were given only to the people who left Egypt and this makes sense for those *mitzvot* which are connected to the Exodus. But as far as the rest of the *mitzvot* are concerned, if they are statutes and ordinances of truth, why were they not given to Christians?"

So Thomas answered, "The Jews have said that is not a good question, just as it is not a good question to ask, 'Why was the donkey not made a philosopher or the mule a prophet?' or a question like 'Why was greater light not given to the moon than the sun?'"

So the King said, "I have not asked you about what fools say. But I have asked you what is your opinion, assuming that you are not a fool like they are."

So Thomas said, "Even with regard to this, I had a debate with Abravanel. And because of these matters, I disliked him for a long time because he is such a great sage."

Said the King, "You have not spoken well, because hatred does not come out of a debate."

So Thomas answered, "And, for this reason, Jews are separated --because grass feeds on dust, and the living creature feeds on grass, and all grass is mixed with the living

creature and man who is in a higher category than the living creature does not feed exclusively a herbivore and actually feeds on those things that are pleasing to his nature and therefore he feeds on animals, but not all animals because he does not feed on the horse or the donkey. But the Jew, who is above the ordinary level of man, does not eat from living creatures except from certain types of living creature and even from those only after many preparations like salting, washing and removing its fat and blood until that meat is changed and becomes something that is no longer meat, but a different kind of food. Thus it should not be said that the Jew eats the flesh of cows. But a Christian can eat all living things without any kind of alteration. Therefore the prophet said with regard to food, 'I shall separate you from the peoples.' And, thus, in the matter of *mitzvot*, this was given only to someone who was above the category of man. Therefore it is said about them, 'I shall make you a special people from all the nations.' Therefore these *mitzvot* were not given to the non-Jews."

Said the King, "How did you answer him?"

Thomas said, "I told him the truth, because all these *mitzvot* were not given to us because of our importance and perfection because fat and blood [normally] excite lust. And that is the case with the flesh of the pig and other living creatures. But the Jews pursue lustful things as the Creator testifies against them. 'Therefore, oh Harlot, listen to the word of God.' Therefore these commandments became necessary for Jews in order to remove them from those things which lead them towards lust. But in the case of the Christians, because of the goodness of their character and their perfection, they turn everything toward their own nature just as honey turns the bitterness of orange peels into



sweetness.”

The King said to him, “You should have refuted him with regard to all of the rest of the *mitzvot* outside of the category of food.”

Said Thomas, “Even this is due to our importance and the excellence of our character, because only very little is necessary for us to reach the highest perfection just as we have seen in men who are models of health that when they become ill, they need very little medicine to return them to health because health is natural to them. But there are people who are weak in their composition need many kinds of medicine to bring them back. And this is the case of the Jews for whom even the 613 commandments are not enough to make them good. And indeed, it seems that the Christians are like the sun and the Jew is like the moon just as the philosopher wrote because the angels, since they are all intelligence, do not require to do any work by themselves for their perfection, since they are all intelligence except, for the movement of the spheres, and the sun, because it is the pinnacle of material things can perform actions by itself and that is movement. But one movement is sufficient for it and the sphere after it, farther away from perfection, has to make two movements for its perfection while the sphere of the moon needs to make many movements because of its great distance from the top.”

Said the King, “You answer extremely well and you will not decrease your respect because of the words of that sage. It is known to everyone that religions do not persist except in imagination. The Jew thinks through the strength of his own imagination that there is no other faith and no other religion than his own and the person who believes in anything else is, in his eyes, similar to a cow. And I have heard that people say that when

they walk by our cemeteries that they say, 'May your mother be greatly ashamed and may the one who bore you bear reproach.' And the Christian thinks that the Jews is just like the cow in the form of a human being and his soul is going to dwell in the lowest level of hell. And if you ask a Muslim, he will say about the two of them, that hell is full of them. And at the far aisles of the sea, there are people who bow down to the form of a donkey and bear the symbol of the donkey on their banner. The greatest one and the tallest one who can reach it kisses it. And when Christians go by, they laugh at them saying that we bow down to the form of a man even though it is the most honored form of any, to the point where the prophet says with regard to the throne of God that his appearance was like the appearance of a man and with regard to the animals in that picture, he says, 'The appearance of their faces are like the face of a man.' And the God who removed all forms from Jews, nevertheless ordered them to make cherubim in the Temple sanctuary and they bear the form of the human being." After this, the King said, "That is enough for our talk for today because the sun is declining. Tomorrow we will come back because your words have been sweet to my tongue."

On the next day Thomas came and the King said to him, "We have talked a lot about these matters and I have not yet gotten an answer from you with regard to the reason for the fall of the Jews."

So Thomas said, "I would first like to ask you, O King, what I have heard about you."

Said the King, "What evil have I done? Let the one who like to tell, speak."

Said Thomas, "You have sent a prince to war and when he made a mistake in

what he did, you ordered that he should no longer see your face. Then you sent another prince to that place and he made a mistake and you did not give him any punishment. So how can a just king, who found them both equal in sin, punish one and leave the other unpunished?"

Said the King, "Whoever told you this is not among the seekers of truth. In the case of the first, I carefully briefed him with a full picture of the war and all of its details and he did everything the wrong way. But in the case of the second prince, I was not even involved in sending him to war. Yet he thought that he was doing my will and he went there and he acted according to his conscience. So why should he die from this deed?"

So Thomas answered, "Let your ears, my Lord, hear what has come out of your mouth. For the first prince really means the Jews who were ordered regarding the avoidance of the worship of the forms of heavens. And there came to them forty prophets after Moses to warn them, yet they did the opposite. Therefore, God did not want them to see His face anymore, as it is said in the book of the Bible, 'I shall certainly hide my face from them.' And its statement, 'And he shall send them to another land this very day' is true. But God did not call all the people who worship idols nor were they commanded, yet on their own initiative they saw it fit to honor the Host of Heaven as one honors princes because of the honor that derives from the king. Therefore he said to Jews, 'Only you have I known from all of the families of the earth then I will visit (all of your iniquities) upon you.' (Amos) And furthermore, they were punished because in the case of all of those people, there is not one who worships two gods. And whoever worships

two negates one, while the Jews worshiped many gods to the point that it was said about them that there were in Samaria in a royal city 365 houses of idolatrous worship, corresponding to the number of days of the solar year. And people were worshiping every one of them for one day. At the end of the year, they had worshiped them all. And this matter was odious to God, for multiplicity contradicts unity. But the Trinity is not multiplicity but actually simple unity to the one who understands. And I saw three sages from among the sages of Germany, and I learned from them, from the books of kabbalah. And from it I clearly deduced how the trinity really is unity. In the midst of these studies, I asked them, who is better they (those Jews) or their ancestors? And they said certainly in the case of our ancestors, their small finger was stronger than our loins and the Temple will prove it because the Temple was restored to them after a period of 70 years. And I said to them, 'If they are better than you and yet they served a multiplicity of gods, why do you not believe in the Trinity, all the more so, that from the book of your kabbalah, it is evident that it is a complete unity.' So they answered me, 'On the contrary, from our ancestors we received a warning not to serve a multiplicity because all we have been warned from all of the prophets that if they served in an idolatrous way they would fall hard and big.'"

So the King said, "They answered you better than you asked."

Said Thomas, "And if the Trinity is a unity, there can be no complaint that comes from the punishment of their ancestors with regard to their failure to observe the Trinity."

Said the King, "Let me tell you, Thomas, that I am far from the ideology of the kings who preceded me who sought to compel the Jews to the faith of Jesus and

afterwards were not successful. Because in the heart of hearts, these people are Jews in all considerations. I have already told you that there are three kinds of wasted waters: the waters baptism upon a person of Jewish persuasion, the waters that fall on the sea, and the water that is on top of wine. And the reason that I have is the following: the Jews who experienced those high and holy stations (at Mount Sinai) and those miracles and the fire from Heaven at the time of the giving of the Law fixed that image which became ingrained in them. And therefore that they should give up that initial form which is in their hearts and that they should don a new form, is as it were an overturning of nature. But Christians, when they don the form of the faith of Jesus, did not previously have another form for him except the words which came forth from their own imagination which is the general worship of forms. And who does not have a fixed form is susceptible to receiving any form."

Said Thomas, "So I say that it is not possible to remove their faith from the heart of Jews except through fire because it was given by fire."

Said the King, "You have spoken well. But people will say to you that the God who gave the Torah by fire can be removed by fire but not by you. And this is what I heard at the table of my father from two Jewish emissaries, Don Caspe ben Beneviste, and Don Suleiman ben Yaish. They were emissaries from the Jewish communities that were from Castile. And when people said in front of my father, to those men, that they should come to the faith of Jesus, they answered that since the Torah was given with 600,000 miracles and the appearance of the Shekhinah and the fire from Heaven, its removal should be just like its donation. Therefore [they said], let the great God come to

a mountain, show us his greatness and tell us that we should abandon the faith of Moses and that we should take on the faith of Jesus. And then the king will see whether or not we persist. Therefore I say to you that it is not proper to fault the Jews for their stubbornness, all the more so, in matters pertaining to our Messiah even though they are not beyond reason, they are not attracted to reason. Therefore our faith has been called an interpretation and not a religion. But yet I live in it and I shall die in it and I shall be buried with it and it will save me and it will settle me in the Garden of Eden with the kings who went before me. And I am not saying this to take up the cudgels on their behalf, but only to say that we do not have the capacity to make them give up their faith."

Said Thomas, "But how many things that are irrational do I see that they believe?"

So the King said, "Tell me some of them."

So Thomas said, "They say that when they stood at Sinai, God cut open the whole Heaven from on top and yet the Heavens are not susceptible of any damage or any cutting. And they say that God was sitting in the tent of Moses and therefore God is corporeal. Yet they flee from belief in our Messiah because he had a body. They say that in the Second Temple, fire did not come down from Heaven and yet they found on a mountain a flask full of oil and they took from it and they put it upon the sanctified wood on the altar and the oil turned into fire. They say that when the prophet Habakkuk was walking to a field to feed the harvesters, an angel came and took him several parsangs away to a lion's den where Daniel happened to be and the two of them ate and drank together. And Habakkuk returned to the sowers and still the time for eating had not yet arrived. They further say that in the case of a righteous man among these harvestmen, his

goats were standing up against the foxes and eating them. And another one said that they put vinegar in the holy lamp and lit it instead of oil."

Said the King, "I have also heard some stupid things of the Jews like those. They say that a bird laid an egg which destroyed 60 villages. They further say that in a certain place by the sea iron fell down and seven years passed before it hit the bottom of the sea. And I am greatly surprised because those people who say these words were wise and learned. Maybe they were alluding to well-kept secrets. Or maybe a malevolent fool inserted these words in the Talmud in order to mock all of their words. Be that as it may, from this we cannot infer that they should believe in the Trinity, because such things strengthen the faith in the hearts of the people at large since they thus see the power of God and how God watches over the righteous to the point where He changes nature on their behalf. And this, perhaps, was the intention of the people who so spoke. But the Trinity challenges their faith because they believe in strict unity and there is no power or speculation in their common people to determine that they are three and one at the same time. Therefore they say to you that they believe in things that strengthen their faith and not in what might destroy it."

Said Thomas, "These words are worthy to be inscribed and commented upon in the presence of a learned man. But let us return to the matter at hand and talk about the fall of the Jews in a natural way, if we do not want to consider it as a means of punishment. Our lord said it was because of their increasing wealth. Look at the fact that King Solomon took out of the Temple 1800 talons of gold and 7000 talons of silver, and set the gold and silver kept on increasing. This was mentioned in the long Book of

Chronicles where we find that Israel had a thousand thousandths and a hundred thousandth swordsmen and among the children of the royal seed, there were 470,000."

The King said, "I am amazed at two things. First, how did Solomon get all of that wealth? And secondly, how did those Jews decrease in numbers after they had been so numerous as you have said?"

Answered Thomas, "They used to have their wealth brought to them in the ships of Ophir every year in a miraculous way. And his father left him a great fortune which he had stolen from people and therefore Solomon did not want to build the house from it."

So the King said, "You are worthy of a great punishment because you have reviled us. For are you saying that what a king takes with his sword should be called robbery? But let your wisdom make atonement today for your sin. So what, therefore, will you say on the matter of the decrease in population which the Jews have suffered?"

So Thomas said, "They lost numbers in mighty wars, as I shall say, those who were left who came to your kingdom at that time were beset by a heavy plague because it was they who brought plague to the world. So says the Bible, God will stick you with the plague, you and not any other people. And this is when they were still in their own land. But after they left, it went over to us because of the biblical verse that says, 'Woe to the wicked one and woe to his name.'"

So the King answered, "If the person saying these words were somebody else, I would have thought that he had eaten the brain of a cat. But now, [Marcus] Tullies [Cicero] was greater than you. He said that fifty years before the Jews came to Spain there was a severe plague, so great that all the gates of the great kingdom were closed,



especially Cordelia, Toledo and Seville. Even in my time I saw a great plague and a hundred of the Christians succumbed everyday. But from the Jews not one died. In the evenings, the Christians used to bring their children to the houses of Jews in order, perhaps, that they might be saved. And in the great city of Rome, and all of its surroundings, the plague lasted for three years running to the degree that people thought that God had become angry at them and wanted to kill them all. Therefore, let what is said in a shameful way about Jews be enough and don't place upon them what they are not responsible for. I was even about to say that you had spoken favorably about them at first, only to place this venom upon them at last. So let us return to our subject because still there is no natural explanation as to their downfall."

Thomas answered, "I am saying to my lord that their greatness and excellence was the very cause of their downfall. It is similar to a tree, which when its height becomes excessive, it becomes the cause of its downfall because the wind controls it excessively. The same thing is true with the Jews: the spirit of haughtiness comes over them and the sense of the enmity that is within the haughty brings them down. The prophet said concerning them, God sends them from the heavens to the earth. All of which refers to what we have already said, namely, that their rise to the heavens was the reason of their very fall because they became very proud, one against the other, until their hearts were separated from one another to a great degree. And it is known that everything in the world comes in pairs except for pride, which has no companion. But from pride came enmity between them, and from enmity came separation, and each one of them got to saying that the rulership and kingdom was most appropriate for him. And in order for

some to be able to rule against others, they brought outsiders in. And when the outsiders knew their secret feelings and how separated their hearts were from one another, the fear of the Jews was removed from them. They did not regard the Jews highly at all and they attacked them and brought them down. For this time, it was said of the Jews what the Bible said, namely that the kings of the earth did not believe that an enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem. But now the Jews could not withstand their enemies because their great numbers along with their divisiveness led to their diminution. And with every one of them turning in his own way in order to provoke his neighbor, their strength was weakened in this way and their great numbers, great like a multitude of gnats proved to be of no help or consequence to them. And regarding them in this area, the prophet said, 'All of us have strayed like sheep.'

Now the naturalists say that among living beings, there is nothing more foolish than the species of sheep. And therefore the prophet says that we have strayed like sheep. But they did not even have the good qualities of sheep who love to gather together. On the contrary, each one of them turned his own way and therefore the Bible says, 'Each one turned his own way.' As a result the struggles dragged out among Jews according to the evil of their disposition. And how wonderfully Nicholas di Lyra who knew about them commented that when the scripture says in Exodus 'you shall not cause any fire to burn in your dwelling places on the Sabbath day' it was not referring specifically to a fire literally because its prohibition was already known just like it says, 'you shall do no work on the Sabbath day.' But rather it was referring figuratively to the fire of dissension which Jews are told not to burn in their dwelling places, in accordance with the custom of

the Jew who does no other work when he is at rest."

Says the King, "You have expounded very well and that is like the case of the thief who is part of the very household he is robbing. But in the case of the Sabbath, I have a quarrel with Jesus. Why did he not command us regarding [the observance of] the Sabbath? Inasmuch as the Sabbath, is the teaching regarding the creation with which we agree with the Jewish faith. Now if you should say that on the first day Jesus entered his heavenly place, that would be all right if the Christians observed the first day with a cessation from work just like the Sabbath. But Christians' observance is only seen in their eating and taking long walks, whereas Jews observe their Sabbath with an abstinence from work and reading the law of God. And so, too, the Muslims on the sixth day read their sacred book, the Koran, and in this way they have a superiority over us."

So Thomas answered, "Christians are not obligated with cessation from work because the keeping of the Sabbath has two purposes. One is the remembrance of the creation of the world out of nothing, and the second, the remembrance that they were servants in Egypt as it is said, 'you shall remember that you were a servant.' But the Christians who did not leave Egypt, do not have the recollection that demands the cessation from work."

Said the King, "Since we have been talking about this at length let me ask you "why did Moses choose the Sabbath day and the prophet of Islam the sixth day and Jesus the first day?"

This is Thomas' answer: "Moses said that it was appropriate to give honor to the day of rest because on that day God rested. You will find God's perfection in his rest and

not in the doing of things in which it may be seen that God needs them and gets his perfection from doing these things. As the prophet of the Muslims said, a human being should be glad on the day that God completed his work. Therefore God commanded that the sixth day, on which the work of creation was completed. But Jesus chose the first day because it is appropriate to give honor to the beginning of creation so that every individual should see in God that he is first.

Now let me finish the natural reason, I shall explain that the Jews, through their own hands, brought evil upon themselves on so many different occasions. At the time of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, when Jews went to seek a lightening of their load from the son of Solomon he answered that he would make their load heavier than before. And this was not an appropriate way for him to answer them, because it is appropriate for someone who is anointed king to treat his people and servants with grace and honor because he does not know what the next day will bring. And the king is king in their name. But the Jews, also because of the wickedness of their nature and their haughtiness, immediately despised the monarchy of the house of David, because, just as they chose new gods, they chose new kings. And they took it upon themselves to take counsel to wait until a king would accede to their requests. As a result fierce battles ensued and the populace became smaller and smaller because evil destroys itself. And of what use was their cleverness of which our lord has spoken if their wisdom was to harm one another and not to strengthen their battles against an enemy. So then, the son of Nebat went to Egypt and he brought Shishak against Solomon and revealed to him the secrets of the Jews and the way in which the city of Jerusalem could easily be conquered. At the same time his people in the

city who were partisans of ben Nebat were sending letters to Shishak as to how he should proceed. When this became known to the partisans of Solomon, they started a war in the middle of the city and they killed one another to the degree that they succeeded in doing what the enemy could not accomplish.

Now your exalted father once got angry at Jews and wanted to destroy them. But a counselor said to him 'Be careful, our lord, because no king ever had an idea like this who subsequently did not fail. However, if you wish to take vengeance on the Jews, order that all of them should be brought together in a single city without any outsider in its midst, and let them set up officers over them. And you shall see that at no time will they have a common agreement and as a result, they will kill one another and your hand will not have touched them.

The second downfall: At the time of a king called Abijab, the king spoke good things to them and they answered that they no longer had any part in the House of David and wars resulted from this. And in those wars there fell 400,000-- and over that 500,000 warriors, all the nobility of Israel.

The third cause at the time of the kings of Judah who sent the king of Egypt a gift consisting of all the vessels of the House of God in order that the king of Egypt might come to his aid. This was also a reason for their downfall because they profaned the holy vessels and delivered them into the hands of strangers. The king of Egypt attacked them and smote them badly and said that the time had come for him to take vengeance on what the Jews had done to his forbears at the shores of the Reed Sea.

The fourth: At the time of the wars of the two kings, one from Judah and one

from Israel, the king of Israel made an accusation that the hands of the priests were involved. Therefore on one day they murdered 20,000 priests. The fifth: at the time of another king named Menachem who decimated the Jewish people. When King Sennacherib heard about their many factions. He attacked them with a great army. Menachem gave him a thousand talents of silver so that he should come to his military aid and he promised to be Sennacherib's servant. But he was reluctant to give him the necessary sum from his treasuries. Instead he put the burden upon the people, who were then forced to sell their children in order to provide that sum of money.

The sixth reason: at the time when Nebuzzareden attacked them, the Talmudic scholars were to write that in those battles the casualties were twice the number of those who had gone forth from Egypt, and that at that time, the Holy Temple was put to fire and 200,000 died from hunger. So it is written in the old Book of Chronicles.

The seventh: the fall of Alexandria, where during the wars over Jerusalem, many Jews came, numerous like the sands, and became quite prosperous and built a temple. Then they began to lord it, one over the other, and one group sent an emissary to Emperor Trajan that he should attack the other. Then Emperor Trajan came and started a war inside and outside the city and 500,000 died by the sword.

Eighth: this took place at the hands of two brothers who were called Hyrcanus and Aristobulus because the younger did not want to yield the rightful rule to the elder. So Aristobulus sent a present to Pompey, the Roman general, asking him to come to his aid. The gift consisted of a golden vine, 500 golden talents in weight, along with precious stones and rubies. And then Pompey came with a great army. The two brothers compete

inside the city and Pompey on the outside and a large number of people fell, each by his brother's sword. The kingdom was left to Hyrcanus and Aristobulus was brought bound in chains to Rome.

The ninth: at the time of Herod's war, there was also a case of great divisiveness.

The tenth: the fall of the Second Temple, when Titus attacked. Then 400,000 died from famine and Titus noted their stubbornness because Titus was asking from them only that they should raise the Roman's flag on the gate of Jerusalem three times a year so that it should be seen that the Romans had control over them because if they showed such tenacity with their own brethren, all the more so did they show it with foreigners. Let me tell my lord that there was a Jewish man named Menasseh who had a Moabite wife contrary to the order of Ezra, who had decreed that Jews should expel all of their Moabite wives in accordance with their own law. But Menasseh refused and all of the priests gathered together and banished him from the Temple service. Then Menasseh, with the help of his father-in-law, Sanballat, gathered all of the heads of the priests and told them that if they would support his claim to officiate in the Temple service, that would be good but if not, he would do something that all of them would regret and would forever be unable to repair. The priests laughed at his words. Then he went and assembled many people through many bribes because he was very rich, and planned to build a temple on Mount Gerizim. Then Sanballat brought King Alexander a considerable bribe in an effort to persuade, which he did. Now all of the towns nearby were very happy because of the burden upon them when they had to go to Jerusalem, and because of the profit that was derived from the pilgrims who had come there to celebrate a festival.

Now Menasseh was very clever. He sent a courier to all of the surrounding territories saying that whosoever wanted to go to his sanctuary would not have to give obligatory terumah and tithes, only whatever he felt he could voluntarily give. He said that God has no desire of things that are done through compulsion but only through free will offerings. In this way, he attracted the heart of the poor people to him and he built a sanctuary. Then all of the surrounding territories abandoned the sanctuary which was in Jerusalem which God had chosen because the Jews have no law that has any profit motive attached to it. As a result, wars dragged on between the Jews going to Jerusalem and the Jews who were going to the new sanctuary and a large number of people from both sides fell in these wars. And so the true priests used to go forth against the new priests whom Menasseh had created. And at the time of the pilgrim festivals people fell by the thousands. This new sanctuary lasted for about two hundred years until a new king arose named Hyrcanus. Hyrcanus was a very kind and religious king and he broke down that new temple and destroyed it and he killed many people and did fearful things and the Jews returned to Jerusalem. But, in those wars, there fell a third of the entire Jewish populace.

Now I shall tell my lord of the obstinacy of these various groups. Among them were found two brothers, the children of a righteous man among the Jews. The older one did not know as much about the service of the Temple as the younger one, so their father ordered that the younger one should be named High Priest. But the younger one did not want it and said that his older brother should be named the High Priest and that is the way it was for a period of time. In the course of time, the younger one had a change of mind.



So he sought a strategy to bring his older brother down and remove him from being the High Priest. So he said to him, 'Come, let me show you how the service is to be done. So he dressed his brother in a garment which priests were not accustomed to wear and girded him with a belt that was not the belt of the service but rather looked like the garment and the belt of the clothing that women wear. And, in this way, he brought his brother to the altar. He then went to the priests who were in the Temple and said to them, 'Just look at him, for my brother has a lover with whom he is living out of wedlock and this is her garment and her belt which he had sworn that on the day he would become the High Priest, he would wear as a sign of his love for her.' Then all the priests arose to kill his brother, but he begged mercy from them and asked them to first listen to what he had to say. So he told them of the stratagem of his brother and it was found that he was telling the truth. So they ran after his brother to kill him, but he took refuge in the house of the king and from there they sought him out. And from there he went to Alexandria in Egypt, built a sanctuary there and was appointed the High Priest in that sanctuary. And that sanctuary stood for about two hundred years."

Said the King, "I am surprised how all the details regarding the Jews are stuck in your memory."

Said Thomas, "Perhaps because of this my lord will say that I am one of them. But the truth of the matter is that I preach sermons of rebuke to Christians and I bring a proof from the misfortunes of Jews and a reason for their downfall.

Now I would like to tell my lord two additional reasons. One is that, at first, when the Jews found favor in God's eyes, he used to fight their wars as is known throughout

the book of the Bible. Therefore they did not learn the strategies of war because they were not needed. And therefore it is said concerning them, 'neither a shield nor a sword will be seen.' However, when they said 'God hid his face' from them and they were left bare on all sides, they did not know about the weapons of war or their utilization and the will of God was not with them. As a result they were left defenseless and kept falling like sheep without a shepherd. The second reason is that they did not have the machinery of war to demolish the walls which the Romans and the Greeks had erected. Likewise they did not have the fearful battering rams. Also, in the case of elephants with towers on their backs, since the Jews had not experienced them nor seen them at any time, they did not know how to protect themselves from their damage. They said, to one another, 'look at those strange beasts that they had never heard from before' because they thought that they were beasts of the field."

So the king answered and said, "It is known that something which people have never seen, they cannot imagine the reality of what they are. We find that in ancient times that men riding on horses would come down from a certain mountain to a plain to rob and pillage the people in the plain and these people, since they had never seen someone riding a horse, imagined that the combination was the form of a living creature, from the middle up the form of a man, and that the man and the beast were one body. They called this combination centaurs. This continued until the great hero Hercules passed by and when he saw the centaurs, he laughed at the people of the valley and he pursued the centaurs and showed them that they were men riding on horses. In one war, we had a wagon with a great battering stone and we put it in front of the gate of the city

and we ran with it and the poor people who were in the city thought that it was a wild animal and they fled. So we entered the city and we conquered it. But what should I say, that the Jews did not know what this was all about? That is a lie because the great Josephus wrote that when Titus ordered that they should bring the iron weapons to the wall, a young man came forth and dug underneath the wheels of the wagons and he placed sulphur and pitch there and set them to fire. As a result, the iron rams were burned and all of the people who were guarding them. After that, they brought forth the three iron rams that remained Titus said that four young men had come out from Jerusalem whose names were Tachtius the Galilean, Magnus the Hebronite, Jerome the Samaritan, and Arias the Jerusalemite. They approached the Romans, killed all of the guards and inflicted a great blow on the Roman's camp. And they came at the Romans like a man comes at his maidservant until the Roman army retreated. Then they set fire to the rams. So how should I say that Jews did not know and that these instruments appeared to them like a wild beast? Now in the war of Antiochus, a young man came forth and stuck a sword in the belly of the great elephant because Mattathias had said that if someone could manage to kill the elephant then the tower on it would fall down. So this proves that they knew that it was a tower. So the initial query to this is a query that does not admit any doubt but at least let us know why God banished them from his house."

So Thomas answered, "The reason is that they had brought a foreign god into the house of their God. Therefore, their appropriate recompense was that they should go to the territory of the foreign god and serve him there. And this is known from the words of Jeremiah. The Torah also says 'you shall there serve foreign gods.' Then they went to

Babylonia and there they stayed for seventy years. And I have a very subtle thought regarding this. Why seventy years? This is because of the influence of the planets, for the influence of the planets adds up to this number, and then they return to their original rotation. That is, the years of Saturn are eleven, the years of Jupiter are ten, the years of Mars are seven, the years of the Sun are ten, the years of Venus are nine, the years of Mercury are twelve, the years of the Moon are nine. And thus the Jews remained in their captivity for the years of all of them together because they served all of them together."

Said the king, "And now that they do not have idol worship, why are they being punished for such a long time?"

Said Thomas, "Let it be known to our lord that the sins between any person and his fellow human being are much more severe than the sins between a human being and God because those sins effect the social order of cities and world peace. Now, the Christian is very careful about robbery and deceit and taking interest and the like, but with regard to the sins between them and God they are not careful and there are even Christians who pray only once a year. But with the Jew, it is just the opposite. Because who among the Jews would miss a single prayer? But on the other hand, with regard to thievery and deceit and robbery, they are not very careful. Therefore, God who hates robbery has punished them. And their redemption has been delayed; they have no Messiah and the fools keep calling for him at the end of every Sabbath."

So the King said to him, "So why do they call for the Messiah over wine?"

Said Thomas, "I do not have a reason for it but perhaps the Messiah can be enticed by their wine. And as for the reason why the Temple was destroyed, let me tell

my lord that what happened to the Temple is what essentially happened to our Messiah because Jesus came to atone for the sin of the first man and he received death on account of him, and therefore the Temple came to atone for the sin of Israel and it was burned on account of them?"

Said the King, "The answer that you have given is just as strange as your previous answer because who ever saw a king whose servants sinned against him and he then killed his son in order to atone for their sin or burned his palace."

Said Thomas, "The case of the Messiah is not the same because if he accepted death, only the flesh accepted it while he went immediately to his father who was in heaven and he remained fully alive before him forever. And when he died, he was not really killed except in appearance."

Said the King, "We have spoken enough about matters regarding Jews and what you have said is also appropriate in the case of the sanctuary. But I also have conceived another query because even on the day of anger and rebuke, God remembered their love; and even though his intention was to banish them as nature had condemned them for their sin as you have said. Nevertheless, God did not wish for the Temple to remain in the hands of strangers. All the more so because those sacrifices were appropriate only for the people who had left Egypt. May the God of truth, who knows everything in truth, be praised. But we will speak of matters in a rational way and not deal with their essential theological truth. But in any case, I am very happy by the revelation that there is no truth to what people charge the Jews with doing. And he who seeks evil against someone who has not sinned, evil will come to him says God."

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