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# The Jews and the Crusaders

*The Hebrew Chronicles of the First  
and Second Crusades*

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tell the people to return to their homes, but to be in constant preparedness to return to the king upon his command.

The next day the king summoned only the officers, knights, and deputies. They took counsel with the king and decided to shut the gates on the borders of the kingdom of Hungary, so that henceforth not a single errant one might enter. As to those who had already entered—they began to slay those who lagged behind. Upon capturing a group of a hundred errant ones, they would slay them; they repeated this procedure on the next day and the day after that, until they had slain all those accompanying Peter the Priest. And the Blessed Holy One avenged upon them the blood of His servants, and not a single man of them remained alive.<sup>225</sup>

The kingdom of Hungary was strongly fortified because of the enemy. Then came the army of the Rhine, composed of the inhabitants of the Rhine—a very great army; also the Swabian army and the army of France, as well as the Austrian army, who are the sons of Seir who dwell in Hori—an immense horde as numerous as the grains of sand upon the seashore. At their head was the evil Emicho, count of Leiningen, may his bones be ground to dust! They arrived at the Hungarian border, at the city of Wieselburg.<sup>226</sup> Clay pits surrounded the city. They tried to attack the city but were unsuccessful. The leaders and the counts decided to send emissaries to the king of Hungary, requesting that for the sake of the crucified one he grant them passage, assuring him that they would not wield their arms. The counts chose four of their number to bear this message. The king ordered them imprisoned for four days; on the third day, the four noblemen swore to the king that they would bring him the head of Count Emicho, and he then released them unharmed.

Emicho was informed of the matter, and he fled in the night; and the remnant also fled. The army of the king of Hungary pursued them and inflicted a great toll on them, more perishing and drowning in the deep marshes than were slain by the sword. A person fleeing would sink into the swamp up to his knees, and, unable to move from there, would finally perish. The Greeks<sup>227</sup> pursued them from all sides till the Danube River. They fled across the bridge which Peter the Priest had made, and it broke. More than thousands—tens of thousands<sup>228</sup>—drowned in the Danube River, until they walked on the backs of the drowned as if on dry land. The survivors

came and told us, and our hearts rejoiced, for the Lord had shown us vengeance against our enemies.<sup>229</sup>

At that time there was an eclipse of the sun,<sup>230</sup> on that day the Lord shattered the pride of our enemies, and their name was uprooted. But the enemies still did not give up their evil designs, and daily they set out for Jerusalem. The Lord gave them over as sheep to be slaughtered and sanctified them for the day of slaying. "Render unto our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom." "Thou wilt render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Thou wilt give them hardness of heart; Thy curse unto them. Thou wilt pursue them in anger, and destroy them from under the heavens of the Lord."<sup>231</sup> "For the Lord hath a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the controversy of Zion."<sup>232</sup> "O Israel that are saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded, forever."<sup>233</sup>

When we first came to Speyer,<sup>234</sup> it was with the hope that we pitch our tent forever, never having to uproot its stakes. We settled there because of the conflagration in Mainz—the city of Mainz, our birthplace, the place of our fathers, that ancient community, famed and praised beyond all the communities of the realm. The entire Jewish section and their street [that of the Gentiles] in Mainz were burned, and we were in great fear of the townspeople.<sup>235</sup> At that time, Meir Cohen arrived from Worms bearing a Torah. Persons thinking that it was gold or silver slew him. According to the order of Creation, it was the year of: "Shall the priest and the prophet be slain in the sanctuary of the Lord?"<sup>236</sup> Our master, Rabbi Meshullam,<sup>237</sup> said to them [the Jews]: "Now you need not fear, for his death overweighs and atones for our transgression."<sup>238</sup>

We then decided to leave and seek settlement in a fortified city. Perhaps the Gracious Lord would be gracious unto us and the Merciful One would have mercy and He-Who-Aids would help to preserve us alive, as at this day. He [the bishop]<sup>239</sup> received us kindly and dispatched his officers and horsemen to accompany us. He then gave us quarters in the city and said that he would build around us a wall with a bolted gate so as to protect us from oppressors; it would thus be a fortress for us. He was compassionate to us, like a father to his son.

We offered prayer to our Creator, morning and evening daily, and we were saved by the Bishop John. Eleven were killed, but the rest of the community was saved, may his memory be blessed and raised.<sup>240</sup>

We then returned to the city, each man to his home and to his place. But those of the upper quarter could not go to the lower quarter of the city in the evening, morning, or afternoon, for fear of the cursed oppressors,<sup>241</sup> so we prayed in the upper quarter, in the *beth midrash*<sup>242</sup> of our Master Rabbi Judah, son of Rabbi Kalonymos, while those in the lower quarter prayed in their house of worship. This custom remained for some years.

The entire labor was completed in the month of Elul,<sup>243</sup> in the year 4864.<sup>244</sup> On the eve of *Rosh ha-Shanah*<sup>245</sup> one of the elders came and declared to the community: "Come, let us go up to the land, to the house which we have established on its foundation and built completely." The elders of the community, the priests, and the Levites went, taking the Torah Scrolls to the ark in the synagogue with great joy, and the Scrolls have remained there to the present day. On the following day, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, we began to pray in it, and we have prayed there to this day.

This is the end.

May God grant that we see the rebuilding of the Temple speedily in our days, and that we behold the graciousness of the Lord and visit His Temple, and may He comfort us in our mourning, Amen.

## *The Chronicle of Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan*

### INTRODUCTION

*The Chronicle of Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan* is unique among the Hebrew chronicles of the First Crusade in that substantial biographical information exists concerning the author. Bar Nathan was born about 1090 and apparently lived until 1170. As a young man he studied under several prominent Talmudic scholars of the time, including Rabbi Isaac bar Asher, first and foremost of the Tosaphists—French and German Jewish writers of critical and explanatory addenda to the Talmud during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. His grandson, Rabbi Eliezer bar Joel ha-Levi (Rabiah), was one of the great German Talmudists of the twelfth century.

In later Tosaphist literature, Rabbi Eliezer bar Nathan is also referred to as Rabbi Eliezer the Elder, or Rabbi Eliezer of Mainz, the town where he lived, though he evidently spent some time in Cologne. Not only was Bar Nathan a man of many skills, he was also a remarkable traveler for his time. Apparently, he visited France, and, in travels through the Slavic countries (referred to as "the land of Canaan" in his responsa), he may have gone as far as Kiev. His legal opinions, found in the compilation entitled *'Even Ha-'Ezer (Sofnat Pa'aneah)*, in fact mention customs of the distant lands to the east, some undoubtedly reaching him through the tales of travelers.

In addition to his scholarly activities, Bar Nathan devoted much of his time to liturgical poetry. More than twenty-five of his poems