

## Fascinating Facts 4.13.24

We are all familiar with the expulsion of the Jews from Spain that took place on the 9th day of Av in the year 1492. That event signaled the end of the centuries-old Jewish community in Spain. The expulsion of the Jews of Spain and the diaspora that followed had repercussions for hundreds of years thereafter. What is much lesser known is that 100 years earlier on Nissan 9, Ash Wednesday, an anti-Jewish riot broke out in Seville. The violence would continue for an entire year. When it was over 50,000 Jews were dead.

That was not the only tragedy. The historian Cecil Roth writes *A wave of massacres of this description was not by any means new in Jewish history. Something of the sort had taken place on the Rhineland during the Crusades, in England in 1189-90, and throughout Germany at the period of the Black Death. The consequences of this occasion, however, were unique. Elsewhere, it had been only a weak remnant which had accepted baptism as the alternative to death. The vast majority had unquestioningly preferred martyrdom "for the Sanctification of the Name" rather than abjure their faith. But in Spain conditions were different. Whatever the reason, throughout the Peninsula, large bodies of Jews accepted baptism en masse in order to escape death.* The number of those who chose Baptism may have been as high as 200,000. These Jews became known in Jewish literature as Anusim or coerced. The Spanish called them conversos, the name Marranos which in Spanish slang means filthy, was coined towards the end of the 15th century. Over the next century many of these converted Jews and their descendants assumed important positions in government and society and associated themselves with powerful noble families. They also achieved economic power and prosperity, which inspired increasing hatred of them by the "old Christians," who already questioned the sincerity of their conversions. Indeed, although there were many devout Christians among the *conversos*, there were also those who were at most agnostic converts, and many secretly continued to practice Judaism.

This hatred of the "new" Christians by the "old" led the church to organize Inquisitions to determine the sincerity of the conversos. The inquisitions ultimately led to the expulsion of 1492. Don Yitzchak Abarbanel who led the Jews out of Spain in 1492 explains that the wealth and level of assimilation of the Jews of Spain led to the high number who chose baptism rather than sacrifice their lives. Ultimately baptism may have exacerbated rather than relieved the problem.