

The Alhambra Decree ( Followed by Isaac Abrabanel's Answer)  
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This is the decree of expulsion promulgated by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand of Spain in 1492, which forced the Spanish Jews, the Sephardim, to leave Spain for ever.

King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Castile, Leon, Aragon and other dominions of the crown - to the prince Juan, to dukes, marquees, counts, the holy orders, priors, knight commanders, lords of the castles, cavaliers, and to all Jews, men and women of whatever age, and to anyone else this letter may concern - health and grace unto you.

You well know that in our dominion, there are certain bad Christians that judaised and committed apostasy against our Holy Catholic faith, much of it the cause of communications between Jews and Christians. Therefore, in the year 1480, we ordered that the Jews be separated from the cities and towns of our domains and that they be given separate quarters, hoping that by such separation the situation would be remedied. And we ordered that an Inquisition be established in such domains; and in twelve years it has functioned, the Inquisition has found many guilty persons.

Furthermore, we are informed by the Inquisition and others that the great harm done to the Christians persists, and it continues because of the conversations and communications that they have with the Jews, such Jews trying by whatever manner to subvert our holy Catholic faith and trying to draw faithful Christians away from their beliefs.

These Jews instruct these Christians in the ceremonies and observances of their Law, circumcising their children, and giving them books with which to pray, and declaring unto them the days of fasting, and meeting with them to teach them the histories of their Law, notifying them when to expect Passover and how to observe it, giving them the unleavened bread and ceremonially prepared meats, and instructing them in things from which they should abstain, both with regard to food items and other things requiring observances of their Law of Moses, making them understand that there is no other law or truth besides it. All of which then is clear that, on the basis of confessions from such Jews as well as those perverted by them, that it has resulted in great damage and detriment of our holy Catholic faith.

And because we knew that the true remedy of such damages and difficulties lay in the severing of all communications between the said Jews with the Christians and in sending them forth from all our reigns, we sought to content ourselves with ordering the said Jews from all the cities and villages and places of Andalusia where it appeared that they had done major damage, believing that this would suffice so that those from other cities and villages and places in our reigns and holdings would cease to commit the aforesaid. And because we have been informed that neither this, nor the justices done for some of the said Jews found very culpable in the said crimes and transgressions against our holy Catholic faith, has been a complete remedy to obviate and to correct such opprobrium and offense to the Christian faith and religion; because every day it appears that the said Jews increase in continuing their evil and harmful purposes wherever they reside and converse; and because there is no place left whereby to more offend our holy faith, as much as those which God has protected to this day as in those already affected, it is left for this Holy Mother Church to mend and reduce the matter to its previous state inasmuch as, because of our frailty of humanity, it could occur that we could succumb to the diabolical temptation that continually wars against us so easily if its principal cause were not

removed, which would be to expel the said Jews from the kingdom. Because whenever a grave and detestable crime is committed by some members of a given group, it is reasonable that the group be dissolved or annihilated, the minors for the majors being punished one for the other; and that those who pervert the good and honest living on the cities and villages and who by their contagion could harm others, be expelled from the midst the people, still yet for other minor causes, that would be of harm to the Republic, and all the more so for the major of these crimes, dangerous and contagious as it is.

Therefore, with the council and advice of the eminent men and cavaliers of our reign, and of other persons of knowledge and conscience of our Supreme Council, after much deliberation, it is agreed and resolved that all Jews and Jewesses be ordered to leave our kingdoms, and that they never be allowed to return.

And we further order in this edict that all Jews and Jewesses of whatever age that reside in our domain and territories, that they leave with their sons and daughters. their servants and relatives, large and small, of whatever age, by the end of July of this year, and that they dare not return to our lands, not so much as to take a step on them not trespass upon them in any other manner whatsoever. Any Jew who does not comply with this edict and is to be found in our kingdom and domains, or who return to the kingdom in any manner, will incur punishment by death and confiscation of all their belongings.

We further order that no person in our kingdom of whatever station or noble status hide or keep or defend any Jew or Jewess, either publicly or secretly, from the end of July onwards, in their homes or elsewhere in our reign, upon punishment of loss of their belongings, vassals, fortresses, and hereditary privileges.

So that the said Jews may dispose of their household and belongings in the given time period, for the present we provide our assurance of royal protection and security so that , until the end of the month of July, they may sell and exchange their belongings and furniture and other items, and to dispose of them freely as they wish; and that during said time, no one is to do them harm or injury or injustice to their persons or to their goods, which is contrary to justice, and which shall incur the punishment that befalls those who violate our royal security.

Thus we grant permission to the said Jews and Jewesses to take out their goods and belongings out of our reigns, either by sea or by land, with the condition that they not take out either gold or silver or minted money or any other items prohibited by the laws of the kingdom.

Therefore, we order all councilors, justices, magistrates. cavaliers, shield-bearers, officials, good men of the city of Burgos and of other cities and villages of our reigns and dominions, and all our vassals and subjects, that they observe and comply with this letter and all that is contained in it, and that they give all the help and favor that is necessary for its execution, subject to punishment by our sovereign grace and by confiscation of all their goods and offices for our royal state house.

And so that this may come to the notice of all, and so that no one may pretend ignorance, we order that

this edict be proclaimed in all the plazas and usual meeting places of any given city; and that in the major cities and villages of the diocese, that it be done by the town crier in the presence of the public scribe. and that neither one nor the other should do the contrary of what was desired, subject to the punishment by our sovereign grace and deprivation of their offices and by confiscation of their goods to whosoever does the contrary.

And we further order that evidence be provided to the court, in the manner of signed testimony, regarding the manner in which the edict is being carried out.

Given in this city of Granada on the thirty first day of March in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ -1492. Signed, I, the King, I the Queen, Juan de Coloma, Secretary of the King and Queen, which I have written by order of our Majesties.

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#### Edict Response by Isaac Abravanel

Your Majesties, Abraham Senior and I thank you for this opportunity to make our last statement on the behalf of the Jewish communities that we represent. Counts, dukes, and marquees of the court, cavaliers and ladies.... it is no great honor when a Jew is asked to plead for the safety of his people.

But it is a greater disgrace when the King and Queen of Castile and Aragon, indeed of all Spain, have to seek their glory in the expulsion of a harmless people. I find it very difficult to understand how every Jewish man, woman, and child can be a threat to the Catholic faith. Very, very strong charges.

We destroy you?

It is indeed the opposite. Did you not admit in this edict to having confined all Jews to restricted quarters and to having limited our legal and social privileges, not to mention forcing us to wear shameful badges? Did you not tax us oppressively? Did you not terrorize us day and night with your diabolical Inquisition? Let me make this matter perfectly clear to all present: I will not allow the voice of Israel to be stilled on this day.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, King and Queen of Spain, for I, Isaac Abravanel, speak unto you. I and my family are descended directly from King David. True royal bold, the blood of the Messiah, runs in my veins. It is my inheritance, and I proclaim it now in the name of the God of Israel.

On behalf of my people, the people of Israel, the chosen of God, I declare them blameless and innocent of all crimes declared in this edict of abomination. The crime, the transgression, is for you, not us, to bear. The unrighteous decree you proclaim today will be your downfall. And this year, which you

imagine to be the year of Spain's greatest glory, will become of Spain's greatest shame.

As honor is the reward of individual virtue, so too worldly renown of kings and queens is their proper due for noble deeds. So, too, when unseemly acts are committed by and individual, that person's reputation's suffers. And when kings and queens commit shameful deeds, they do themselves great harm. As it is said, the greater the person who errs, the greater the error.

Errors, if recognized early, can be corrected. The loosened brick that supports the structure can be reinserted into position. So, too, a mistaken edict if caught in time can be undone. But religious zeal has undermined reason, and misguided counsel has perverted sound judgement. The error of the edict will soon become irreversible as the very deed which it proclaims.

Yes, my king and queen, hear me well: error, your error, profound and uncorrectable, the likes of which Spain has never seen before. You and you alone are responsible. As arms measure the might of a nation, so arts and letters measure its finer sensibilities. Yes, you have humbled the Moslem infidel with the force of your army, proving yourselves able in the art of war. But what of your inner state of mind? By what right do your Inquisitors go about the countryside burning books by the thousands in public bonfires? By what authority do churchmen now want to burn the immense Arabic library of this great Moorish palace and destroy its priceless manuscripts? By whose rights? By whose authority? Why, it is by your authority, my king and queen. In your heart of hearts, you distrust the power of knowledge, and you respect only power. With us Jews it is different. We Jews cherish knowledge immensely. In our homes and in our prayer houses, learning is a lifelong pursuit. Learning is our lifelong passion; it is at the core of our being; it is the reason, according to our sages, for which we were created. Our fierce love of learning could have counterbalanced your excessive love of might. We could have benefited from the protection offered by your royal arms, and you could have profited the more from our community's advancement and exchange of knowledge. I say to you we could have helped each other.

As we are reminded of our own powerlessness, so your nation will suffer from the forces of disequilibrium that you have set in motion. For centuries to come, your descendants will pay dearly for your mistake of the present. As it is might of arms you most admire, you shall verily become a nation of conquerors - lusting after gold and spoils, living by the sword and ruling with a fist of mail.

Yet you shall become a nation of illiterates; your institutions of learning, fearing the heretical contamination of alien ideas from other lands, and other peoples, will no longer be respected. In the course of time, the once great name of Spain will become a whispered byword among the nations: Spain, the poor ignorant has-been; Spain, the nation which showed so much promise and yet accomplished so little.

And then one day Spain will ask itself: what has become of us? Why are we a laughing - stock among nations? And the Spaniards of that day will look into their past and ask themselves why this came to be. And those who are honest will point to this day and this age as the time when their fall as a nation began. And the cause of their downfall will be shown to be none other than their revered Catholic sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, conquerors of the Moors, expellers of the Jews, founders of the Inquisition, and destroyers of the inquiring Spanish mind.

This edict is a testimony to Christian weakness. It shown that we Jews are capable of winning the centuries - old argument between the two faiths. It explains why there are "false Christians." that is, Christians whose faith has been shaken by the arguments by the Jew who knows better. It explains why the Christian nation would be as injured as it claims to be. Desiring to silence Jewish opposition, the Christian majority has decided not to argue any further, but rather to eliminate the source of dangerous counter - argument. The opportunity to the Jews is not to be granted after today.

This is the last opportunity on Spanish soil to state our case. In these last few moments of freedom granted to me by the King and Queen, I as the spokesman of Spanish Jewry, will dwell on one point of theological dispute. I will leave you with a parting message although you will not like it.

The message is simple. The historical people of Israel, as it has traditionally constituted itself, is the final judge of Jesus and his claims to be the Messiah. As the Messiah was destined to save Israel, so it must be for Israel to decide when it has been saved. Our answer, the only answer that matters, is that Jesus was a false Messiah. As long as the people of Israel lives, as long as Jesus's own people continue to reject him, your religion can never be validated as true. You can convert all the peoples and savages of the World, but as long as you have not converted the Jew, you have proved nothing except that you can persuade the uninformed.

We leave you with this comforting knowledge. For although you can dispose of our power, we have the higher truth. Although you can dispose of our persons, you cannot dispose of our sacred souls and the historical truth to which only we bear witness.

Listen, King and Queen of Spain, for on this day you have joined the list of evil-doers against the remnant of the House of Israel. If you seek to destroy us, your wishes will come for naught, for greater and more powerful rulers have tried to finish with us, and all have failed. Indeed, we shall prosper in other lands far from here. For wherever we go, the God of Israel is with us. And as for you King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, God's hand will reach out and punish the arrogance in your heart.

Woe unto you, authors of iniquity. For generations to come, it will be told and retold how unkind was your faith and how blind was your vision. But more that your acts of hatred and fanaticism, the courage of the people of Israel will be remembered for standing up to the might of imperial Spain, clinging to the religious inheritance of our fathers, resisting your enticements and your untruths.

Expel us, drive us from this land that we cherish no less than you do. But we shall remember you, King and Queen of Spain, as our Holy Books remember those who sought our harm. We Jews shall haunt your accomplishments on the pages of history... and the memories of our sufferings will inflict greater damage upon your name that anything you can ever hope to do to us.

We shall remember you and your vile Edict of Expulsion forever.