

# Sages of the Ages

## Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508)



- I. Background: Father (Judah), Grandfather (Samuel)
  - a) Abarbanel
    1. Pronunciation
    2. Derivation
  - b) Family origins: Fled Castile for Portugal following massacres of 1391
- II. Portugal (Lisbon)
  - a) Mentors: Rav Yosef Hayun, Rav Yosef ibn Shem Tov
  - b) Treasurer to King Alfonso V
  - c) Philanthropy (Redeeming from captivity Jewish community of Arzila, Morocco)
  - d) Death of Alfonso:
    1. Accused of conspiracy by son and successor John II
    2. Warrant for arrest, fortune confiscated
    3. Fled (back) to Castile, settled in Toledo
- III. Spain
  - a) As a refugee, returned to writing—extraordinary productivity
    1. Commentary on Joshua in 16 days
    2. Commentary on Judges began on 1<sup>st</sup> Kislev, finished on the first day of Hanukkah
  - b) Summoned to service of Ferdinand and Isabella (united Kingdoms of Aragon and Castile)
    1. Financed invasion of Muslim Kingdom of Granada (Andalusia)
    2. Reconquista complete after 800 years
      - 2.1. Alhambra Decree (Expulsion of Jews from all of Spain) 31 March 1492
      - 2.2. Urging of Torquemada, Inquisitor General and Confessor to the monarchs
      - 2.3. Efforts, in vain, to rescind the decree
        - 2.3.1. Tragedy of Court Rabbi of Castile, Don Abraham Senior of Segovia
          - 2.3.1.1 *Shadchan* of the Royals, powerbroker of the Kingdom, friend and colleague of Abarbanel
          - 2.3.1.2. Baptised together with his family, 15 June 1492
  - c) Left with Spanish Exiles on 31 July 1492 (or 2 August 1492=Fast of 9 Av)
- IV. Exile and beyond
  - a) Naples:
    1. Finished Commentary on Kings, begun 8 years earlier
    2. Conquered by French, wealth again plundered
  - b) Messina (Sicily), Corfu (Greek Isles), Monopoli (Southern Italy)
  - c) Finally, Venice (1503): Finance once again
  - d) Died 1508, buried in Padua, next to R Judah Mintz (cemetery overrun the following year)
- V. Writings
  - a) Style (comprehensive, but therefore prolix)
  - b) Categories
    1. Biblical commentaries (refers to and sometimes endorses Christian commentators)
    2. Philosophy (at times defends Rambam but disagrees with excessive rationalism and especially allegorisation of the Torah)
    3. Mashiach (apologetics, polemics, consolation of the Exiles)
- VI. Legacy