The Flagellants Attempt to Repel the Black Death, 1349

The Flagellants were religious zealots of the Middle Ages who demonstrated their religious fervour and sought forgiveness for their sins by vigorously whipping themselves in public. This approach was most popular during times of crisis. Prolonged plague, hunger, drought and other natural maladies would motivate thousands to resort to this extreme method of seeking relief.

Despite condemnation by the Catholic Church, the movement gained strength and reached its greatest popularity during the Black Death, which ravaged Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. Wearing white robes, large groups of the sect (many numbering in the thousands) roamed the countryside, dragging crosses while whipping themselves into a religious frenzy.

"Each had in his right hand a scourge with three tails."

The following description of the Flagellants comes to us from Sir Robert of Avesbury, who witnessed their ritual:

"In that same year of 1349, over six hundred men came to London from Flanders... Sometimes at St Paul's and sometimes at other points in the city, they made two daily public appearances wearing clothes from the thighs to the ankles, but otherwise stripped bare. Each wore a cap marked with a red cross in front and behind.

Each had in his right hand a scourge with three tails. Each tail had a knot and through the middle of it there were sometimes sharp nails fixed. They marched naked in a file one behind the other and whipped themselves with these scourges on their naked and bleeding bodies.

Questions

1 Fill in PS (primary source) and SS (secondary source) in the two circles in the left-hand column.

2 Write a-h in the boxes below to match the words in the text with their definitions:

A state of uncontrolled or wild behaviour
A group of people with extremist political or religious beliefs
Diseases or ailments
Intense and passionate feeling
Official criticism and disapproval
A term for people who are fanatical and uncompromising in their religious or political ideals
Forcefully, energetically
Damaged or destroyed

3 Draw a picture of a scourge as described by Sir Robert of Avesbury. The picture provided above will give you an indication of what a scourge looked like.


Roslyn Green – The Brotherhood of the Flagellants – The Black Death
The Persecution of the Jews in Medieval Europe

The Jews were accused unfairly in 1348 and 1349 of poisoning wells and **infecting** people with the plague. Many people made the Jews into **scapegoats**, blaming the innocent.

Historians have suggested that this might have been connected with the fact that fewer Jews **died** from the plague. Since the Jewish holy book **Torah** gives advice on basic **hygiene** to stop the spread of diseases, many Jews refused to use the unhygienic wells that were located near the town sewage pits. They chose instead to drink from fresh water sources.

This may have caused **superstitious** and ignorant people to blame the Jews for the plague. Consequently, Jews were **massacred**, **tortured** and even burned alive.

Some writers believe that this was the worst **persecution** of the Jews before the Holocaust in the 20th century, when the Nazis, with all the technology of the modern world behind them, committed **atrocities** against the Jewish population of Europe.

4 Write each word **in bold** above beside its definition below:

- **Describes people who are willing to believe in supernatural and irrational explanations**
- **Terrible, inhumane crimes; acts of vicious, unthinkable cruelty**
- **Victimisation and ill-treatment of a particular group**
- **Murdered in large numbers**
- **A person who unfairly takes the blame for something**
- **A word for clean conditions that are likely to prevent disease and maintain health**
- **Causing someone to catch or contract a disease**

5 Fill in the words in the puzzle below in order to discover words relating to the Jewish people and their treatment in history. The **underlined words** in the text above will help.

- **a** The Jews were unfairly accused of putting this in the wells.  **P**
- **b** Jewish holy book  **R**
- **c** Source of water in medieval towns; not always hygienic!  **E**
- **d** The adjective for “Jew”  **J**
- **e** To inflict severe pain on someone as a punishment or in order to get him or her to do something  **U**
- **f** Many historians believe that fewer Jews **died** from the plague.  **D**
- **g** The racist political party and people who were responsible for the genocide of the Jewish people in 1939-1945  **I**
- **h** The word for the mass murder of the Jews in WW2  **C**
- **i** Word for an innocent person who is unfairly blamed  **E**