

CHAPTER
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Section 3

PRIMARY SOURCE

Kristallnacht by Eric Lucas

On November 9, 1938, Nazis violently attacked Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues in Germany and killed about 100 Jews. Michael Lucas, a butcher in the small community of Hoengen, witnessed the destruction of a synagogue. In this account, Lucas's nephew Eric recounts the desecration that his uncle observed. How did Michael Lucas react to the violent attack?

After a while, the stormtroopers were joined by people who were not in uniform; and suddenly, with one loud cry of "Down with the Jews," the gathering outside produced axes and heavy sledgehammers. They advanced towards the little synagogue which stood in Michael's own meadow, opposite his house. They burst the door open, and the whole crowd, by now shouting and laughing, stormed into the little house of God.

Michael, standing behind the tightly drawn curtains, saw how the crowd tore the Holy Ark wide open; and three men who had smashed the Ark threw the Scrolls of the Law of Moses out. He threw them—these Scrolls, which had stood in their quiet dignity, draped in blue or wine-red velvet, with their little crowns of silver covering the tops of the shafts by which the Scroll was held during the service—to the screaming and shouting mass of people which had filled the little synagogue.

The people caught the Scrolls as if they were amusing themselves with a ball-game—tossing them up in the air again, while other people flung them further back until they reached the street outside. Women tore away the red and blue velvet and everybody tried to snatch some of the silver adorning the Scrolls.

Naked and open, the Scrolls lay in the muddy autumn lane; children stepped on them and others tore pieces from the fine parchment on which the Law was written—the same Law which the people who tore it apart had, in vain, tried to absorb for over a thousand years.

When the first Scroll was thrown out of the synagogue, Michael made a dash for the door. . . . The stormtroopers, who still stood outside the house watching with stern faces over the tumultuous crowd which obeyed their commands without really knowing it, would have shot the man, quietly, in an

almost matter of fact way. Michael's wife, sensing the deadly danger, clung to him, imploring him and begging him not to go outside. Michael tried to fling her aside, but only her tenacious resistance brought him back to his senses. He stood there, in the small hall behind the front door, looking around him for a second, as if he did not know where he was. Suddenly, he leaned against the wall, tears streaming from his eyes, like those of a little child.

After a while, he heard the sound of many heavy hammers outside. With trembling legs he got up from his chair and looked outside once more. Men had climbed on to the roof of the synagogue, and were hurling the tiles down, others were cutting the cross beams as soon as they were bare of cover. It did not take long before the first heavy grey stones came tumbling down, and the children of the village amused themselves flinging stones into the multi-coloured windows.

When the first rays of a cold and pale November sun penetrated the heavy dark clouds, the little synagogue was but a heap of stone, broken glass and smashed-up woodwork.

Eric Lucas, "The Sovereigns," quoted in Martin Gilbert *The Holocaust* (New York: Collins, 1986). Reprinted in Anthony Read and David Fisher, *Kristallnacht: The Nazi Night of Terror* (New York: Random House, 1989), 106–107.

Discussion Questions

Recognizing Facts and Details

1. According to Michael Lucas, who took part in the destruction of the synagogue?
2. What did the crowd of people do inside the synagogue?
3. **Making Inferences** What was the mood of the Germans who took part in the destruction of the synagogue?