

# The Crusades: War in the Holy Land

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Richard I leaving England for the Crusades in 1189. Painted by Glyn Warren Philpot between 1925 and 1927. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Beginning in 1096, Christian warriors from Europe undertook a series of military campaigns known as the Crusades. They were designed to take back control of the Holy Land from the Muslims. The Holy Land was an area in part of the Middle East known as Palestine. It was considered sacred because it was the birthplace of Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. Today it is the country of Israel.

Only the First and Third Crusades were successful in reclaiming parts of the Holy Land. However, the Crusades played an important role in history.

## Origins of the Crusades

The Crusading movement was the result of a number of important factors. By the end of the 11th century the countries of Europe had become major powers. Their populations had grown dramatically and their governments had become better organized. This enabled European leaders to build up large armies.

Religious beliefs at the time were another important factor. According to the idea of holy war, Christian warriors had a duty to fight for the church. The practice of traveling to holy sites also influenced the Crusades. Before the year 1000 most Christian pilgrims journeyed to the holy sites of Europe, but after the year 1000 journeys to Jerusalem in the Holy Land became increasingly popular. Some people believed that they were living at the end of time. They thought it best to be in Jerusalem when Jesus returned at the Last Judgment.

These developments were affected by changes in the Holy Land and in the Byzantine Empire. This was a Christian Empire covering parts of eastern Europe and Asia Minor. It was also called Eastern Roman Empire because it had continued the Roman Empire after Rome fell.

In 1071, the Muslim Turks defeated Byzantine armies in battle and extended their control over much of Asia Minor. They also seized control of Jerusalem. The previous rulers of the Holy City were Arabs who had allowed Christian pilgrims to visit, but the Turks did not. They also persecuted Christians and attacked Christian holy places.

As the power of the Turks spread, the Byzantine emperor sent a plea for help to Pope Urban II, the leader of the Catholic Church. The pope called a council in 1095. He urged his audience to undertake a Crusade to rescue the Holy Land. Priests, knights and common people alike shouted, "God wills it!"

### **The First Crusade**

Urban's speech inspired the First Crusade (1096-99). Many people were so deeply stirred that they would not wait until the time set by the council for the Crusade to begin. At least four separate bands started for the Holy Land early in 1096. One of them managed to reach Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. The Crusaders caused the emperor some difficulties but were killed in an attack by the Turks.

In August 1096, the first real armies began their march to Jerusalem. The Crusaders went first to Constantinople, where their leaders met the Byzantine emperor and unwillingly swore an oath to restore land to him. They then made a dangerous march across Asia Minor to Antioch. For seven months they attacked the city, suffering almost as much as the people inside the city walls. After the Crusaders captured Antioch, they themselves were attacked by a Turkish army. In three weeks, many died from disease and hunger.

The Crusaders left Antioch for Jerusalem in January 1099. A much smaller Crusading army reached the Holy City in June 1099. The soldiers laid siege to the city's walls, finally capturing it on July 15. The Crusaders then brutally killed all of the city's men, women and children. After the slaughter, the Crusaders went to kneel at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, believed to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion.

Many Crusaders returned home, but others stayed and were joined by new Crusaders. They built castles and established Crusader states to protect the Holy Land.

### **Second Crusade and the fall of Jerusalem**

The loss of the important Crusader city Edessa (now in Turkey) and the spread of Muslim power inspired the Second Crusade (1147-49). It was led by Europe's greatest rulers, Emperor Conrad III

of Germany and King Louis VII of France. But the Crusade was a disaster. It succeeded only in worsening relations between the Crusaders and the Byzantine Empire.

For the next several decades the Crusader states were relatively stable. In the 1180s the situation worsened because of internal problems and the rise of a new Kurdish Muslim leader, Saladin, who had ruled Egypt and Syria. In 1187 he won two great victories against the Crusaders. Saladin wiped out a Crusader army in northern Palestine and took control of Jerusalem.

### **Third Crusade gains a treaty for pilgrims**

Saladin's conquest inspired the Third Crusade (1189-91). The leaders were Richard the Lion-Hearted of England, Philip Augustus of France and Frederick I of Germany. The German expedition collapsed when Frederick drowned in Asia Minor in June 1190.

Richard and Philip took their armies by sea, sailing from the French Mediterranean coast. When they reached the Holy Land, they joined the Christians attacking the city of Acre. The Crusaders finally captured the city in July 1191. Philip and Richard then quarreled, and Philip returned to France. Richard stayed but could not capture Jerusalem from Saladin. However, he did recapture several other cities and arranged a peace treaty with Saladin in 1192, which allowed Christian pilgrims to visit the holy sites.

### **The Fourth Crusade**

In 1198, the new pope, Innocent III, proclaimed a new Crusade. The Fourth Crusade (1202-04) was aimed at attacking Egypt because the pope thought that the Holy Land could be protected only by attacking Muslim power centers. Alexius III, a rival of the Byzantine emperor, offered to assist the Crusaders if they helped overthrow the emperor. They did so, and Alexius became emperor. But he did not hold up his end of the bargain. As punishment, the Crusaders seized Constantinople. They burned part of the magnificent city and divided the lands of the emperor. The Byzantines eventually regained control of their empire, but the Crusader conquest seriously weakened them.

### **Results of the Crusades**

The Crusades played an important role in the transformation of European society in the 12th and 13th centuries. The Crusades led to trade in spices, foods and fabrics with the East and new kinds of knowledge, such as making paper.

The Crusades ultimately failed to regain the Holy Land. But they prepared the way for a later wave of European expansion in the 15th and 16th centuries and the European exploration of the New World.

## Quiz

- 1 Which selection from the section "Origins of the Crusades" shows the MAIN reason behind the Crusades?
- (A) By the end of the 11th century the countries of Europe had become major powers. Their populations had grown dramatically and their governments had become better organized.
  - (B) Some people believed that they were living at the end of time. They thought it best to be in Jerusalem when Jesus returned at the Last Judgment.
  - (C) These developments were affected by changes in the Holy Land and in the Byzantine Empire. This was a Christian Empire covering parts of eastern Europe and Asia Minor.
  - (D) The previous rulers of the Holy City were Arabs who had allowed Christian pilgrims to visit, but the Turks did not. They also persecuted Christians and attacked Christian holy places.

- 2 Which selection from the article suggests that European culture would be different today without the Crusades?
- (A) Only the First and Third Crusades were successful in reclaiming parts of the Holy Land. However, the Crusades played an important role in history.
  - (B) They built castles and established Crusader states to protect the Holy Land.
  - (C) The Crusades led to trade in spices, foods and fabrics with the East and new kinds of knowledge, like papermaking.
  - (D) The Crusades ultimately failed to regain the Holy Land.

- 3 Read the selection from the section "The Fourth Crusade."

*As punishment, the Crusaders seized Constantinople. They burned part of the magnificent city and divided the lands of the emperor. The Byzantines eventually regained control of their empire, but the Crusader conquest seriously weakened them.*

Which of the following words, if it replaced the word "seized" in the selection above, would CHANGE its meaning?

- (A) yielded
- (B) captured
- (C) occupied
- (D) conquered

- 4 Read the selection from the section "The First Crusade."

*Urban's speech inspired the First Crusade (1096-99). Many people were so deeply stirred that they would not wait until the time set by the council for the Crusade to begin.*

What does the author mean by the phrase "deeply stirred"?

- (A) The speech created an atmosphere of dread.
- (B) The speech compelled people to action.
- (C) The speech encouraged people to consider the cause.
- (D) The speech provided a sense of reassurance.