

THE CRUSADES

Until the dawn of the seventh century, the Holy Land, later named Palestine, was ruled by a succession of European peoples. Every year great numbers of Christians, rich and poor, made the pilgrimage from all over Europe, Minor Asia, and North Africa to the Holy Land. The Muslim conquerors took over Palestine from the Romans in AD 638. They continued to allow Christian pilgrims to visit the Holy Land without any incident until around AD 1000, when the Seljuk Turks (Muslims from Turkey) gained power in the Holy Land and began killing those Christians who came on pilgrimage. This action angered Christian leaders who have been looking for a way to re-conquer Palestine and gain control of Jerusalem. Thus began the Holy Wars, or Crusades.

Year Islamic Crusade

633 Mesopotamia fell
635 Damascus
638 Jerusalem
645 Alexandria
649 Cyprus
673 Constantinople was attacked
693 Whole of Christian North Africa conquered
711 Invasion of Spain
732 Poitiers
734 Avignon
743 Lyons
813 Port of Rome was sacked
826 Crete (till 961)
837 Naples was sacked
838 Marseilles
842 Sicily

Year Islamic Crusade

846 Rome was sacked again.
870 Malta
878 Syracuse fell (9 month siege; very few survivors)
889 Toulon (North Italy)
902 Thessaly (central Greece) destroyed
921 A large band of Englishmen, on pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles in Rome, were crushed to death under rocks rolled down on them by Muslims in the passes of the Alps.
935 Genoa attacked
976 Fresh expeditions into Italy
1010 Cosenza (Southern Italy) fell
1015 Sardinia fell
1017 Mujahid bin Abd Allah (Muslim ruler in Sardinia) crucified Christians

The Crusades lasted for nearly two hundred years, from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. It was officially announced at the Council of Clermont in 1095 by Pope Urban II in response to an appeal from the Byzantine emperor (the Eastern Roman Empire) to help in attacking Muslim Turks. In an effort to restore relations with the Eastern Church and to take back the holy city of Jerusalem, Pope Urban II commanded:

“I say it to those who are present. I command that it be said to those who are absent. Christ commands it. All who go thither and lose their lives, be it on the road or on the sea, or in the fight against the pagans, will be granted immediate forgiveness for their sins. This I grant to all who will march by virtue of the great gift which God has given me.” Urban II ¹

The First Crusade was launched a year after the Pope’s announcement. Initially, the Christian Crusaders were successful due to the lack of unity among the Islamic powers. Fighting parties of Muslims did not work with each other and as a result Jerusalem fell in the hands of the Crusaders on July 15, 1099. Immediately, the Muslims began to fight back so additional forces from Europe were needed to hold the city as part of the “Latin Kingdom.” Bands of armed men arrived from Europe and while some remained to hold the city, for many it was nothing more than an armed pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

¹Justo L. Gonzalez, The Story of Christianity Volume I. Harper and Row, New York 1984. pg. 292.

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For several centuries, the enthusiasm of the crusaders continued to the point of organizing The Children's Crusade in 1212. The Children's crusade resulted in masses of children and young teens marching eastward to die or become enslaved by enemy forces. For 200 more years a series of high points and enterprises marked the continuing efforts to regain the Holy Land for the Christian Church and to spread Christianity by force into the rest of the Eastern world. The efforts are often named or numbered in History books as the following:

- The First Crusade (AD1096 - 1099): The People's Crusade or Siege of Jerusalem.
- The Norwegian Crusade (AD1107–1110): Sigurd I of Norway goes on a crusade and defeats Muslims in Spain, the Balears, and Iberia.
- The Second Crusade (AD 1147 - 1149): The Fall of Edessa.
- The Third Crusade (AD 1189 - 1192): The Fall of Acre and the failure to take Jerusalem back, sometimes called the King's Crusade.
- The Fourth Crusade (AD 1201 -1204): The Fall of Constantinople. This is often seen as the final breaking point of the Great Schism between the Eastern Orthodox Church and Western Roman Catholic Church.
- The Fifth Crusade (AD 1218 - 1221): The attack on Egypt leads to the establishment of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.
- The Sixth Crusade (AD 1228 -1229): The Retaking of Jerusalem with a treaty allowing Christians to rule over most of Jerusalem, while giving Muslims control of the Dome of the Rock.
- The Seventh Crusade (AD 1248 - 1254), and the Eighth Crusade (AD 1270): Both were disastrous attempts to take more of the East.
- The Ninth and Last Crusade (AD 1291): Deemed a failure thus ending the phase of Middle East Crusading for the Church.

In areas like Spain, Christians fought Muslims for “la reconquista”, the re-conquest of lands that had once been for the Christians and taken by Muslim in AD 711. In 1492, and after nearly 800 years of rule, Muslims were defeated and pushed out of the land they had called Andalusia. For many Muslims, the loss of Andalusia (Spain) is still felt as a defeat that must one day be reversed.

At end of the long wars in the Middle East, the Crusaders in Palestine were defeated, and Jerusalem would continue to be fought over between Muslims and Jews to this day. The negative effects of the Crusades can still be seen in the relationships and attitudes towards the Christian world displayed by Muslims today.

The Christian church, under attack since the 7th century by the Muslims, became enthused with the Muslim concept of holy war. With no Bibles to educate and enlighten the Christians, they strayed away from Christ's teachings and allowed their beliefs to be reshaped by the conquering powers of Islam, and the myths and cults of that age. Though European Crusaders may have been lawful in reclaiming their lands that Islam had captured by force, but they wandered off from the origins of their faith when they slashed and burned and forced conversions, doing this in the name of Christianity. Jesus never used violence; neither did He call His disciples to use it. The New Testament never endorsed violence to spread the Word of the true God.

In contrast, Muslims who slashed and burned and forced conversions did not wander off from the origins of Islam, but followed it closely. It is a plain and unpleasant historical fact that in the ten years that Muhammad lived in Medina (AD 622-632), he either sent out or went out on seventy-four raids, expeditions, or full-scale wars, which ranged from small assassination hit squads to mass murdering of entire Jewish or Christian tribes. Muslim extremist who follow the footsteps of their prophet, still wage Holy wars, or Jihad, to this day, to spread Islam by force.

As the 2 billion Muslim look back to the European Crusades, they fail to distinguish between the true followers of Christ who would never wage war in the name of their Master, and those Crusaders who raised the cross to be the

banner in their wars against the Muslim occupants.

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