

HOLY WAR

A doomed quest called the Children's Crusade was just part of a series of wars over the Holy Land—the Crusades

In those days, religious passion spread like a fever. From village to village across the European countryside, a scruffy throng of people marched, armed with nothing but wooden crosses. Along the way, thousands of people left their homes to join them.

Amazingly, they were led not by a knight on a horse but by a boy. Nicholas of Cologne believed that God had called him to lead the pilgrims all the way to Jerusalem on a sacred mission: to free the birthplace of Christianity from the Muslim army that occupied it.

The year was 1212, the height of the **Middle Ages**. For more than a century, armies of knights from Europe's Christian kingdoms had

made the long, perilous journey to try to take back the Holy Land—what today is Israel and parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. Most important was Jerusalem, the ancient capital of the Jewish people and the place where Christians believed Jesus Christ had died. This series of expeditions, called the **Crusades**, left untold numbers of people dead and the Middle East bathed in blood.

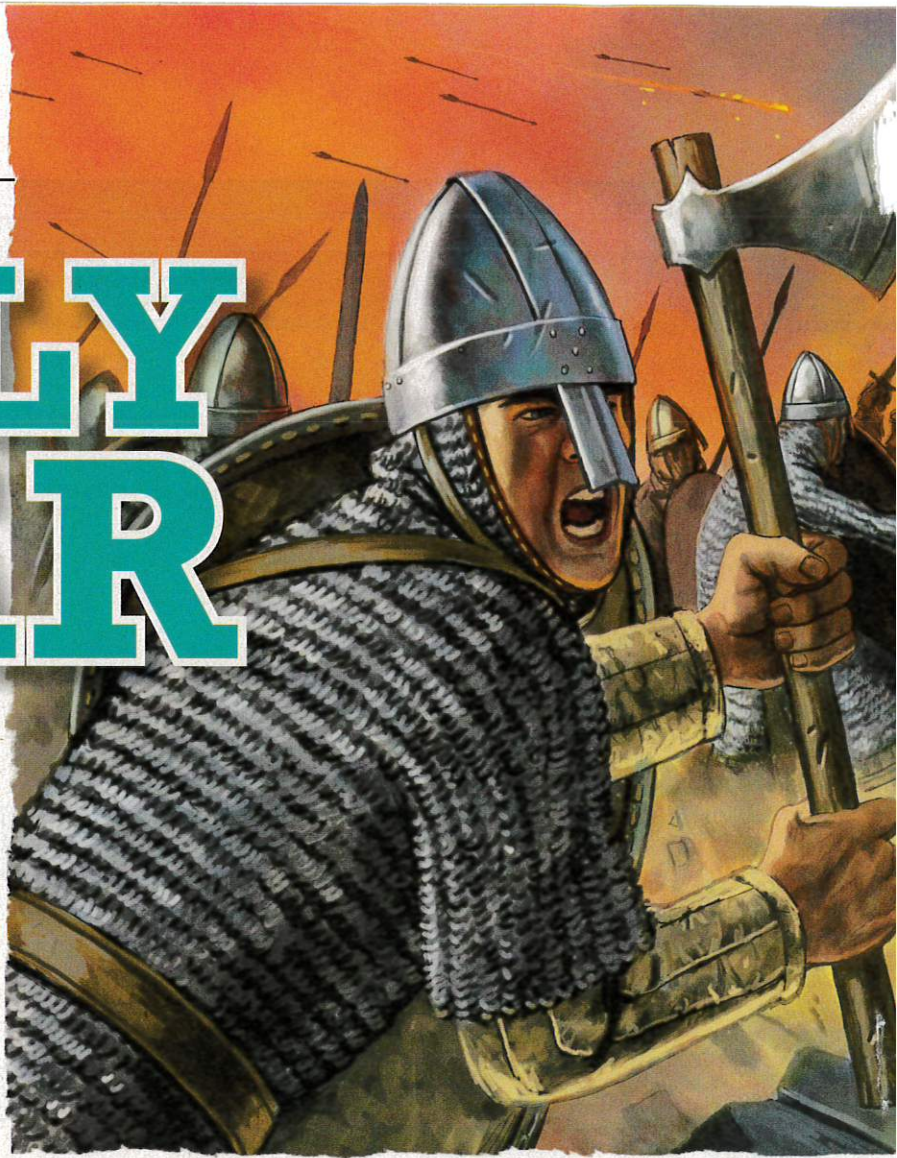
The Third Crusade (1189-1192) had ended with Muslim armies

holding on to Jerusalem. As anguished Christians wondered what had gone wrong, movements of young people and the poor rose up, seeking peaceful quests.

Among them were Nicholas and his followers. Because so many of them were young, their journey is called the Children's Crusade. Very little is actually known about them. Many turned back or died. Probably none of them made it past Italy. For historians, their fate is but one curious episode in the long, tragic tale of the Crusades.

“Blood to the Knees”

Jerusalem was central to the story of Christianity, which arose during the 1st century A.D.



Words to Know

- **Middle Ages** (*n*): period of European history from the 5th century A.D. to the Renaissance (starting in the 13th century)
- **crusade** (*n*): a passionate campaign for a social or religious purpose



The Crusaders "went berserk" on the way to Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

"CENTURIES LATER, RELIGIOUS WARS REMAIN VERY MUCH WITH US."

Six centuries later, the prophet Muhammad founded Islam in present-day Saudi Arabia. Muslims also venerated Jerusalem as their third-most holy city. From 638 A.D., when Muslim warriors seized the Holy Land, Europeans watched with alarm as the armies of Islam moved ever closer to the Christian kingdoms of Europe (see map, p. 19).

In 1095, Pope Urban II, head of the Roman Catholic Church, addressed a huge gathering in the French village of Clermont. "An accursed race . . . has violently invaded the lands of [the]

Christians," the Pope said. He called for a holy war to fight the invaders. The Crusades had begun.

Pope Urban's appeal touched a nerve. Wealthy nobles rushed to pledge their armies of knights. Multitudes of ordinary people also came forward. Peasant farmers left their lords' lands, and men were let out of prison to join the Crusade. In 1097, as many as 60,000 people began crossing from Europe into Asia Minor (today Turkey).

Only the hardest and best equipped of knights and soldiers had a chance of making it. Finally,

in June 1099, the main force of Crusaders, about 13,000 men, faced the walls of Jerusalem. Many had died on the journey. Most of their horses were long gone, many eaten by starving troops. The men were exhausted and their leaders were constantly squabbling.

But as an attacking force, they came together. On the night of July 13, the assault began. The Crusaders wheeled big wooden "siege towers" up to the walls, climbing them to attack. The Muslim defenders rained down arrows and "Greek fire," flaming pots of sulfur or pitch, on their heads.

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Godfrey of Bouillon, a French noble who had sold many of his lands to raise an army, was the first over the walls. Crusaders surged over at other openings. A furious battle broke out in the streets leading to the Temple Mount—the site of the Jewish temples, now topped by the Muslim Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque.

“The [Crusaders] went berserk,” writes one modern historian, “and killed anyone they encountered.” For eyewitnesses like Raymond d’Aguiliers, that was a *good* thing. “Our men cut off the heads of their enemies [or] shot them with arrows,” he wrote. “In the Temple . . . men rode in blood to the knees and bridles of their horses.”

The slaughter went on into

the next day. About 10,000 people were killed on the Temple Mount, many of them civilians. The Crusaders burned Jews to death in their synagogues and beheaded Muslims in the mosque.

When word of the capture of Jerusalem spread, Christians all over Europe celebrated. For months to come, as the Crusaders praised God for their victory, the stench of death lingered in the city.

A Story Still Told

The Crusaders didn’t stop there. With other cities captured along the Mediterranean coast, they formed the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

But from the start, the Kingdom had to fight for its survival. Despite its

legendary warriors like the Knights Templar (*see illustration*), it was surrounded by hostile country. A Second Crusade, then a Third, Fourth, and Fifth were called to take back cities captured by Muslims. The Crusaders continually lost ground. In 1291, Muslims captured Acre, the last Crusader state, and the Kingdom was no more.

The Crusades weren’t a total loss, experts say. They led to a greater understanding of the Muslim world and the flowering of European culture called the Renaissance. Still, centuries later, religious wars remain very much with us. Recently, a Sunni Muslim army called the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has killed thousands of innocent people, Shia Muslims and Christians alike. It also horrified the world by beheading two American journalists.

Many historians say the Crusades have never ended. European countries and the U.S. have continually tried to shape the Middle East in their image—stirring up much resentment there. Osama bin Laden, mastermind of the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, derided the U.S. “crusader armies” that fought the 1991 Persian Gulf War against Iraq.

In a speech a few weeks after September 11, the Crusades were on former U.S. President Bill Clinton’s mind. “I can tell you, that that story is still being told today in the Middle East,” he said. His point was that, almost 1,000 years later, those old holy wars still cast a long shadow that America and its allies can’t afford to ignore.

—Bryan Brown

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

An elite order of warrior monks named for their headquarters at the Temple in Jerusalem, the Templars had their own distinctive gear. (Not available in any stores.)

Templars largely used the standard broadsword of the time. For castle sieges, the crossbow was also popular.

To spot a brother Templar on a crowded battlefield, nothing beat the signature white surcoat with a red cross over the heart. Chain mail under the surcoat helped guard against nasty sword nicks.

While some Templars favored the open-face helmet, the full-head option could really strike fear into the enemy.

The triangular shield was standard issue. Insignia optional.



The First Crusade 1095-1099

Jerusalem is a sacred place to three different faiths. Captured by King David in about 1000 B.C., it became the capital of the Jewish people and the site of their temples. To Christians, it is the city where Jesus taught and died. Muslims believe the prophet Muhammad ascended into heaven from Jerusalem on his Night Journey.

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Questions

1. Where did two main routes of the First Crusade shown on the map begin?
2. What European mountain range did most Crusaders cross?
3. Which city was the Crusaders' gateway from Europe to Asia Minor?
4. Which faiths are represented on the map?
5. The people of the Byzantine Empire were of which faith?
6. Muslims held territory on which continents?
7. Which three cities on the map were in the Kingdom of Jerusalem?
8. What cities were then, and are now, in Syria?
9. While one group of Crusaders in Asia Minor moved south into Syria, where did the other go?
10. Cologne was in which empire then, and which country now?

READING A TIMELINE

RESET QUIZ

SCORE QUIZ

KEY
STANDARD

RH6-8.7

The Crusades

The Crusades were a series of quests by Christian armies to gain control of the Holy Land during the Middle Ages. They spanned multiple centuries and vast lands and were fought by many rulers and armies. Historians disagree over how many Crusades took place and often about their exact dates. But the timeline below will give you an overview of the major Crusades until the fall of the Christian Kingdom of Jerusalem. Study it, then answer the questions.

TIMELINE

1095: Pope Urban II calls for a quest to free Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks, a Muslim power. The expedition will become known as the First Crusade (1096-1099).

1099: The Crusaders capture the city of Jerusalem. They form the Kingdom of Jerusalem from this and other cities seized from Muslim armies along the Mediterranean Sea coast.

1145: After Muslims retake the city of Edessa, in Asia Minor, from the Crusaders, Pope Eugenius III calls for a Second Crusade (1147-1148). It will end in failure.

1187: The Muslim warrior Saladin conquers Jerusalem and captures a relic that Christians believe is from the True Cross of Christ. Pope Gregory VIII appeals for a Third Crusade (1189-1192).

1192: King Richard the Lionheart of England signs a peace treaty with Saladin, ending the Third Crusade. Jerusalem stays under Muslim control but other Crusader cities are secure.

1221: Crusaders attempt to defeat the Muslim rulers of Egypt. But they are bogged down by the Nile River and surrender at Cairo, ending the Fifth Crusade (1217-1221).

1229: A treaty between the sultan of Egypt and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire gives the Crusaders control of most of Jerusalem. Muslims retake the city after the treaty expires in 1239.

1265: Baybars, the sultan of Egypt, begins to conquer Christian cities, brutally slaughtering their inhabitants. He reduces the Kingdom of Jerusalem to a few outposts.

1291: Egyptian Muslim forces take the city of Acre, the Kingdom's last stronghold. The Crusaders leave the Holy Land.

Questions

- About how many years passed between the calls for the First and Second Crusades?
 A 20 B 50 C 70
- After the Crusaders lost Jerusalem to Saladin, how did they get most of it back?
 A by defeating the city's Egyptian rulers
 B by waiting for a peace treaty to expire
 C through a peace treaty with the Egyptians
- Which statement about Saladin is a fact?
 A He conquered Jerusalem and signed a treaty with King Richard the Lionheart of England.
 B He ruthlessly sought power by manipulating both friends and foes.
 C He was able to capture much of the known world because he was a great commander and a skilled negotiator.
- In 1187, Saladin captured a *relic*. Based on the context, which is the *best* definition of the word?
 A part of the body of a dead holy person
 B an object associated with a saint or martyr
 C a trace of some outmoded practice or belief
- Which conclusion might be reached from the timeline?
 A The Crusaders were initially successful but steadily lost ground.
 B Muslims skillfully negotiated to retain control of Jerusalem.
 C Popes called for Crusades in order to acquire political power.



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