



## HFM 007 – A Very Short History of the Crusades

**Michael Rank:** This is the History in Five Minutes Podcast, the #1 podcast for learning about anything in history in no time at all! I'm your host, Michael Rank.

Today's topic is A Very Short History of the Crusades. If you talk about crusade today, usually we mean it for going after a worthy goal. So maybe, a group like Avon will have a crusade against cancer or there might be different administer groups on universities like Campus Crusade for Christ. But it has taken on a really interesting political connotation recently especially in the post September 11<sup>th</sup> world speech that George W. Bush gave shortly after September 11<sup>th</sup>. He talked about referencing the Crusade and there was a lot of backlash in the Muslim world about this because their historical understanding was Western governments coming to their lands and trying to subjugate it. So there are a lot of different opinions on both sides in the Middle East and in the West about what the Crusades were and what went on then.

We're going to look at this in as fast of a time as possible and go over this enormously long and rich history in just a few minutes. The Catholic Church mounted multiple military campaigns against Middle Eastern Islamic states to capture Jerusalem from 1195 to 1291. The Crusaders ultimately failed on their objective but they left a legacy of a deeper connection between the Middle East and Europe.

European Christians had been aware of the spread Islam since its earliest centuries, but this fact was generally regarded with passivity. This changed in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when Europe received a powerful wakeup call. In 1071 at the Battle of Manzikert which took place in what is Eastern Turkey today, sort of like in the Near East. The Seljuq Turks Central Asian Empire whose capital was in Iran destroyed the Byzantine army and fled into Asian Minor. Again, that's modern day Turkey. They almost conquered Constantinople. Then, the most magnificent Christian city on earth where some of the most well defended city walls. Byzantine emperor, Alexios I, appealed to Pope Urban II in Rome to send him mercenaries to push back the advance of the Turks.

Christians were also scandalized by the destruction of holy sites in Jerusalem which had been the site of pilgrimage since the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the destruction of the Holy Sepulchre Church in Jerusalem in 1009 which is believed to be the site of Jesus' crucifixion by the Fatimid caliph provoked the church into action. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for a religious expiatory war to reclaim Jerusalem for Christendom. He proclaimed that the campaign would serve his penance for all who took part whether they were a knight or a commoner. Additionally, participants were told they would have the opportunity to acquire homes in Palestine. Since at the time there were a lot of Europeans in starvation conditions, this wasn't such a bad offer and hundreds of thousands of people answered the call.

The first Crusades were a success and the armies established four kingdoms near or along the Mediterranean Coast including one in Jerusalem. But whatever holy objective launched the Crusade, it seems it quickly veered off course. In 1099, with the capture of Jerusalem, the Crusadian army has massacred 70,000 Jewish and Muslim men, women, and children in the city. Defeats followed in subsequent Crusades as when the Seljuq Turks re-conquered the town of Odessa in South Central Anatolia. In 1187, the Ayyubid leader Saladin



## HFM 007 – A Very Short History of the Crusades

recaptured Jerusalem. You can see this in the terrible Orlando Bloom movie, Kingdom of Heaven.

Upon hearing the news, Pope Urban III died of a heart attack as history goes. By 1202, the fourth Crusade started which was a complete disaster for Christendom. Pope Innocent II called on Christian armies to invade the Holy Land through Egypt. But since many ships were needed, Venice was contracted out to ferry the troops. It was an enormously lucrative contract for Venice. They received 85,000 marks of silver which if we're considering today's money is a war profiteering amount that would make even Halliburton blush.

In 1204, the Crusaders lost sight of their mission to fight for the Holy Land and laid siege to the Eastern Orthodox city of Constantinople. They occupied it for 60 years and caused massive devastation. The Byzantine empire was toppled and it would never recover being completely conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453. This is still a sore point between Eastern Orthodox Christians and Catholics to this day. Plus, Crusader Kingdom in the holy land of Acre fell in 1291. The legacy left better relations between Christians and Muslims and between Latin Catholics and Greek Orthodox Christians in Byzantine.

When the Turkish Ottoman Empire began conquering Eastern Orthodox Christian villages that were Latin Catholic controlled in the 1300's, some Eastern Orthodox Christians commented that they prefer the sultan's turban that the cardinals had. They meant that they'd rather be under Islamic Turkish rule than under Latin Catholic rule. But the encounters between these groups were not altogether negative. The Crusaders brought with them to Europe such technology as the windmill and new techniques for forging weapons that they acquired in the Middle East. Trade and the flow of information also increased as maritime trading colonies grew in Italy, cities that would be key in the renaissance.

Nevertheless, the legacy of the Crusades is mostly a negative one between Muslims and Christians with the wounds remaining unhealed to this day. Some Christians considered the Crusades as a counterattack in the face of centuries of Muslims hostilities as Islamic states expanded throughout the Middle East and North Africa into Spain. Muslims think of the Crusades as the first stage in a vast plan of exploitation of the Middle East that would culminate in European colonialism in 1800's and continue with events like the Iraq war in Afghanistan and other opportunities of European encroachment into Muslim states.

But as we saw in today's podcast, even in the most ostensibly violent times of Middle Eastern history, positive effects could still result from these two different cultures meeting each other.

For more history like this that is offbeat, obscure, but most of all not boring, come check out my website at [www.michaelrank.net](http://www.michaelrank.net). There, you can find podcasts and blog posts like this. I'll even throw in a free history Ebook that you can grab right now at [www.michaelrank.net/freebook](http://www.michaelrank.net/freebook). Have a good day!