

The Crusades

In the 1060s, the Seljuk Turks, who were Muslim, invaded the Christian Byzantine Empire. The Byzantine army needed help defending the empire, so the emperor asked for help from Pope Urban II, leader of the Roman Catholic Church. Although there was tension between Byzantine emperors and the Roman Popes, Pope Urban said that he would send help. He agreed to send help because the Seljuk Turks had also taken over the Holy Land. The Holy land included Jerusalem and other places in Palestine where Jesus had lived and taught.

Pope Urban II met with a group of bishops and noblemen in 1095. He said, "From Jerusalem and the City of Constantinople comes a grievous report ... An accursed race ... has violently invaded the lands of those Christians." The Pope called for a Crusade to free the Holy Land from the invading Muslims. He said people who joined the Crusades would have all their sins forgiven.

By 1096, within the year, thousands of European knights were on their way to the Holy Land. Some knights joined the Crusades because they believed strongly in their religion. Some went because they hoped to win wealth and land. Still others traveled to the Middle East because they wanted adventure.



Christian knights captured Jerusalem in 1099. They massacred the Muslim and Jewish people who lived in the city. The Muslim leader Saladin took Jerusalem back in 1187. The third Crusade tried, and failed to take the city back. Crusaders decided to attack other Muslim lands, but these attacks all ended in defeat.

The Crusades continued off and on for 200 years. Each time the crusaders won, they turned the captured lands into Christian kingdoms. The Muslims took back the lands, which resulted in more knights being sent from Europe. Christians and Muslims committed terrible acts against each other in the Middle East in the name of

their own religion. The Crusades left behind religious hatred that would last for centuries.

In Europe, the Crusades had a major political effect. During the Crusades, European noblemen sold their lands to join the fight. This caused them to lose power in their communities. As the nobles lost power, kings created stronger central governments. By the mid 1400s, there were four strong nation-states in Europe: Portugal, Spain, England, and France.

