

The Crusades

The Council at Clermont

On November 27, 1095, Pope Urban II summoned the French nobles to a church council in a field at Clermont. A pope has never called a meeting like this before. The field is crowded with thousands of lords, knights, vassals, and horses. Pope Urban II stood on a large stage surrounded by cardinals, bishops, archbishops and priests and addressed the crowd with the standard greeting, In Nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Everyone in attendance bows before the Holy Father. Pope Urban II was a powerful speaker; this speech was going to spark the fire for the crusades.

“O race of noble Franks, race most beloved and chosen by God! From the confines of Jerusalem and the city of Constantinople a horrible tale has gone forth...that a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race utterly alienated from God, has invaded the lands of Christians and has depopulated them by the sword, pillage and fire.”

“Christians are being oppressed and attacked; churches and holy places are being defiled. Jerusalem is being destroyed by this unholy race. The Holy Sepulcher (the tomb of Jesus Christ) is in Muslim hands and has been turned into a mosque. Pilgrims are harassed and even prevented from access to the Holy Land.”

After explaining the way the Muslims were defiling the Holy Land the pope pauses in his speech. He now describes some of the crude acts that the infidels are performing on the Christians. *“These infidels circumcise the Christians using their swords.”* Every knight and vassal cringe at the thought, but the pope is not finished. *“The infidels torture Christians as well, they cut a hole in the navel and pull out the intestines and then nail it to the ground. They then begin whipping the victims, making them run in circles, until all of their intestines are pouring from their bodies.”* The whole crowd is disgusted and is now hanging on every word the pope says.

“Other unfortunate victims are bound to posts and pierced with arrows.” The knights cannot believe what they are hearing, in their culture to be killed by a bow and arrow is most humiliating. *“Others are forced to stick out their necks; the infidels attempt to sever the heads with one blow. These men are unarmed and defenseless, this is act is un-Christian.”*

“The noble race of Franks must come to the aid of fellow Christians in the East.”

1. How are these stories and descriptions going to urge people to join the crusades?

Urban Declares a Holy War

“What shall I say of the abominable rape of women?” the pope asks. *“To speak of it is worse than to be silent.”* Urban is not speaking about the rape of a serf by a lord, but of a Christian woman by a circumcised Saracen. The assembly shudders at the thought and the pope now has the audience in the palm of his hand.

“On whom, then, rests the labor of avenging these wrongs, and of recovering this territory, if not upon you—you upon whom, above all others, God has conferred remarkable glory in arms, great bravery, and strength to humble the heads of those who resist you? Let the deeds of your ancestors encourage you—the glory and grandeur of Charlemagne—and your other monarchs. Let the Holy Sepulcher of our Lord and Savior, now held by unclean nations, arouse you, and the holy places that are now stained with pollution.”

The knights are standing now. They are raising their swords to the sky and they are seething with righteous rage and holy indignation. They are ready to kill every infidel on the face of the earth. The pope then holds the cross over his head to silence the knights. The crowd regains its composure as Urban continues: *“Let none of you possessions keep you back, nor anxiety for your family affairs. For*

the land that you now inhabit, shut in on all sides by the sea, scarcely furnishes food enough for its cultivators. Hence it is that you murder and devour one another, that you wage wars to obtain the lands and wealth you so desire.”

The pope has now appealed to their bellies. Not only will they get a chance to kill and slaughter the Saracens, but they will also obtain the possibility of gaining new lands, new resources and new wealth. Every knight in attendance will become a mighty landlord with a great fiefdom. Every lord will become an overlord with greater authority, greater prominence and greater power. Their imaginations run riot with thoughts of God, glory, and booty.

Now the pope’s cry turns into a plea: *“Let hatred depart from you; let your quarrels end. Enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulcher; wrest that land from a wicked race, and subject it to yourselves.”* The pope was calling for an end to all feudal strife so lords, knights, and vassals can get along to conquer a common enemy for God. The pope attempted to give the people of the Christian lands a sense of commonality, and a sense of nationalism.

1. How did Pope Urban get the people to want to fight in the Crusades?
2. What was the pope using to unite all the Christians?

The Ticket to Paradise

The pope then declared, *“Jerusalem implores you to come to its aid. Undertake this journey eagerly for the remission of sins, and be assured of imperishable glory in the Kingdom of Heaven.”* The pope was offering forgiveness of sins—even the most grievous sins—to everyone that embarked on the Crusades. The nobles who go into battle against the Turks will be received in heaven to the acclaim of angels. They will receive glory, everlasting glory, in the court of the omnipotent Overlord who rules over all fiefdoms.

Through the crowd excitement rises until someone cries out, *Dieu li volt*, “God wills it.” Now all the nobles are crying out the same thing with one voice, the voice of the Franks, “Gods wills it.” The pope too, takes up the cry, along with his clerical entourage.

After several minutes, the pope again holds up the cross. The cries subside and the great crowd becomes silent as the Holy Father says, *“Yes, it is the will of God. You today see the accomplishment of the word of our Savior, who promised to be in the midst of the faithful, when assembled in His name. It is He who dictated to you the words I have heard. Let these words be your war cry. Let them announce everywhere the presence of the God in His holy army.”*

“God himself will lead them, for they will be doing His work. There will be absolution and remission of sins for all who die in the service of Christ. Here they are poor and miserable sinners; there they will be rich and happy. Let none hesitate; they must march next summer. God wills it!”

1. What was the most important thing that Pope Urban II promised the crusaders?
2. Why is this promise more important than the others before it?

The Crusades Begin

The day after Urban's speech, the Council formally granted all the privileges and protections Urban had promised. The Red Cross was taken as the official sign of the pilgrims. The crusaders marched on the First Crusade. The First Crusade was the most successful from a military point of view. Accounts of this action are shocking. For example, historian Raymond of Agiles described the capture of Jerusalem by the Crusaders in 1099:

“Some of our men cut off the heads of their enemies; others shot them with arrows, so that they fell from the towers; others tortured them longer by casting them into the flames. Piles of heads, hands and feet were to be seen in the streets of the city. It was necessary to pick one's way over the bodies of men and horses. But these were small matters compared to what happened at the temple of Solomon, a place where religious services were ordinarily chanted. What happened there? If I tell the truth, it will exceed your powers of belief. So let it suffice to say this much at least, that in the temple and portico of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins.”

The First Crusade was the only successful Crusade. The Christians had retaken the Holy Land, without the help of the Byzantine Empire. The crusaders created the Crusader States, Edessa, Tripoli, Antioch and Jerusalem. These four states would be protected by the Christians until the Third Crusade. In addition, two military orders (Templars, and Teutonic Knights) came into power. The stated purpose of these orders was to protect pilgrims and holy sites.

1. Give a description of the First Crusade.
2. Was the First Crusade a success and why?

The Later Crusades

The Christians had recaptured the Holy Lands but by the end of the second Crusade, a Muslim general named Saladin recaptured Jerusalem. Saladin recaptured Jerusalem in 1187, prompting the Christians to launch a Third Crusade led by King Richard “the Lion-Hearted” of England. The Christians won some battles in the Third Crusade, but Saladin was able to hold Jerusalem for the Muslims. The two warriors agreed to a truce that allowed the Muslims control the Holy Lands, but Christians were free to visit their shrines. The Muslims had recaptured all of the Holy Lands by 1291, but the Crusades were a turning point for Western Europe. The returning soldiers told fascinating tales of far away lands; people became interested in other cultures for the first time.

When the Crusades began there were many problems that were about to begin for the crusaders. The Crusades themselves were not very well planned. The men that marched on these Crusades were unprepared for what was ahead of them. They had no knowledge of the terrain in the Middle East, therefore many died from heat exhaustion, starvation, dysentery, and many diseases that were caused by the dry, hot temperatures. They also were not prepared for the distances they would travel. Every battle that was fought by the crusaders was far away from any supplies or water and many thousands died.

Because of the early failures, many crusaders turned back toward France and drowned at sea or were captured and sold into slavery by neighboring peoples. This served as a warning for others who went to fight believing in the cause. Their beliefs did not give them adequate leadership, which was another reason the Crusades were in the most part a failure.

1. What were some of the problems faced by the crusaders during the Crusades?

The "Children's Crusade", 1212

Never in the thirteenth century was there to be a general coalition of Western kings for a Crusade, as there had been in 1187. This was in part due, no doubt, to the internal politics of thirteenth century Europe, in part to the gradual decline of the Crusading movement itself. That the spirit of the Crusade was not dead is amply proved by the eight large expeditions from various quarters of Europe during the thirteenth century. The survival of the Crusading spirit during the century is further shown by the extraordinary movement in 1212 which is known as the Children's Crusade. This expedition which, of course, was not a Crusade at all in the strict sense of the term attracted thousands of children and young adults from northern France and western Germany to its banners.

The "Crusade" was preached in France by a peasant boy named Stephen from a village near Vendome. In Germany, a boy named Nicholas from Cologne started the movement. The sorry business was summarized by a chronicler in these terms:

In this year occurred an outstanding thing and one much to be marveled at, for it is unheard of throughout the ages. About the time of Easter and Pentecost,⁴ without anyone having preached or called for it and prompted by I know not what spirit, many thousands of boys, ranging in age from six years to full maturity, left the plows or carts which they were driving, the flocks which they were pasturing, and anything else which they were doing. This they did despite the wishes of their parents, relatives, and friends who sought to make them draw back. Suddenly one ran after another to take the cross. Thus, by groups of twenty, or fifty, or a hundred, they put up banners and began to journey to Jerusalem. They were asked by many people on whose advice or at whose urging they had set out upon this path. They were asked especially since only a few years ago many kings, a great many dukes, and innumerable people in powerful companies had gone there and had returned with the business unfinished. The present groups, moreover, were still of tender years and were neither strong enough nor powerful enough to do anything. Everyone, therefore, accounted them foolish and imprudent for trying to do this. They briefly replied that they were equal to the Divine will in this matter and that, whatever God might wish to do with them, they would accept it willingly and with humble spirit. They thus made some little progress on their journey. Some were turned back at Metz, others at Piacenza, and others even at Rome. Still others got to Marseilles, but whether they crossed to the Holy Land or what their end was is uncertain. One thing is sure: that of the many thousands who rose up, only very few returned.

Source: *Chronica Regiae Coloniensis Continuatio prima*, s.a.1213, MGH SS XXIV 17-18, translated by James Brundage, *The Crusades: A Documentary History*, (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1962), 213

1. What does this account tell you about the Children's Crusade?
2. What other account would help give a better perspective of the Children's Crusade and why?

The Siege of Jerusalem

During the First Crusade, Christian knights laid siege to Jerusalem in June 1099. The first excerpt is taken from an account by Fulcher of Chartres, who accompanied the crusaders to the Holy Land. The second selection is by a Muslim writer, Ibn al-Athir, whose account of the First Crusade can be found in his history of the Muslim world.

Fulcher of Chartres, Chronicles of the First Crusade

Then the Franks entered the city magnificently at the noonday hour on Friday, the day of the week when Christ redeemed the whole world on the cross. With trumpets sounding and with everything in an uproar, exclaiming: "Help, God!" they vigorously pushed into the city, and straightway raised the banner on the top of the wall. All the heathen, completely terrified, changed their boldness to swift flight through the narrow streets of the quarters. The more quickly they fled, the more quickly they put to flight.

Count Raymond and his men, who were bravely assailing the city in another section, did not perceive this until they saw the Saracens (Muslims) jumping from the top of the wall. Seeing this, they joyfully ran to the city as quickly as they could, and helped the others pursue and kill the wicked enemy.

Then some, both Arabs and Ethiopians, fled into the Tower of David; other shut themselves in the Temple of the Lord of Solomon, where in the halls a very great attack was made on them. Nowhere was there a place where the Saracens could escape swordsmen.

On the top of Solomon's Temple, to which they had climbed in fleeing, many were shot to death with arrows and cast down headlong from the roof. Within this Temple, about ten thousand were beheaded. If you had been there, your feet would have been stained up to the ankles with the blood of the slain. What more shall I tell? Not one of them was allowed to live. They did not spare the women and children.

Account of Ibn al-Athir

In fact Jerusalem was taken from the north on the morning of Friday 22 Sha'ban 492/ 15 July 1099. The population was put to the sword by the Franks, who pillaged the area for a week. A band of Muslims barricaded themselves into the Oratory of David and fought on for several days. They were granted their lives in return for surrendering. The Franks honored their word, and the group left by night for Ascalon. In the Masjid al-Aqsa the Franks slaughtered more than 70,000 people, among them a large number of Imams and Muslim scholars, devout and ascetic men who had left their homelands to live lives of pious seclusion in the Holy Place. The Franks stripped the Dome of the Rock of more than forty silver candelabra, each of them weighing 3,600 drams, and a great silver lamp weighing forty-four Syrian pounds, as well as a hundred and fifty smaller candelabra and more than twenty gold ones, and a great deal more booty.

Refugees from Syria reached Baghdad in Ramadan, among them the qadi Abu sa'd al-Harawi. They told the Caliph's ministers a story that wrung their hearts and brought tears to their eyes. On Friday they went to the Cathedral Mosque and begged for help, weeping so that their hearers wept with them as they described the sufferings of the Muslims in that Holy City: the men killed, the women and children taken prisoner, the homes pillaged. Because of the terrible hardships they had suffered, they were allowed to break the fast.

1. These two accounts of the same event offer different views, based on the readings what are some differences between the two accounts?