A Plea for Help

In 1095, the Byzantine Empire was in trouble. A recent invasion of Turks had seized control of the Byzantine holdings in Asia and was beginning to threaten the city of Constantinople itself. The Byzantine emperor, Alexius Comnenus, wanted to take back the lost land, so he wrote a letter to the Pope Urban II asking for help.

Comnenus probably just wanted the pope to send him some Western mercenaries (professional soldiers that fought for money) to help with the fighting. It is unlikely he ever imagined the repercussions of his letter. The emperor's plea for help was received by Pope Urban II. Unfortunately for Comnenus, Urban had a very different response in mind.

The above is Excerpted from http://education-portal.com/academy/lesson/the-crusades-from-start-to-finish.html#lesson

Each of three major religious groups claimed Jerusalem in the land of Palestine as their holy city.

- To Christians, it was the place where Jesus was crucified and ascended to heaven
- To Muslims, it was the place where Muhammad met three earlier prophets Abraham, Moses and Jesus.
- To Jews, it was the site of the ancient temple built by Solomon

In 600 CE, Arabs conquered the city.

The Arabs continued to allow Christian and Jewish pilgrims to visit Jerusalem. They even allowed Jews and Christians to live in the city.

In 1095, a different tribe of Arabs took over Jerusalem. They refused to allow Jewish and Christian pilgrims to enter the city.

The Pope heard about this and called for Christians to do something. He asked for a volunteer army to go and take back Jerusalem. About 30,000 knights and other fighting men took up the challenge and left to retake Jerusalem. As a sign of their fighting for their religion, each crusader wore a red cross on their shield, armor, helmet, cape or other clothes.

After two years of travel, hunger, disease, and even fighting among themselves, the Crusaders reached Palestine. After some very hard fighting and a three month siege of the city, the Crusaders won and recaptured Jerusalem. Some of the knights stayed to defend the city, but most returned to their homes. One of the unexpected results of the Crusades was that the Crusaders brought back new foods, literature, art, inventions, and ideas from the Arabs.

Success was short lived. About 50 years later, Arabs again captured Jerusalem. The new pope called for another crusade to retake the city. There were several more crusades none of which were successful.

There was an even greater tragedy in the making. One of the Crusades was the Children's Crusade. A child in France had a vision (supposedly a message from god) and his belief was that only children were pure enough to be allowed to capture the holy city. Soon thousands of children from France and Germany gathered to try and reach Palestine. Thousands died of hunger, freezing to death, disease, and accidents before they even reached the Mediterranean Sea. When they finally got to the sea, there was no way to get to Jerusalem. The children
who survived went back home in disappointment. Europeans never gave up the idea of recapturing Jerusalem, they just sort of stopped trying.

modified from [http://medievaleurope.mrdonn.org/crusades.html](http://medievaleurope.mrdonn.org/crusades.html)

Document 2, read if you want further information.

CRUSADES- Overview

What are commonly referred to as "The Crusades" were actually one long, protracted conflict between Christian Europe and the Islamic Near East over the land and holy sites of modern-day Palestine. It was the several aggressive attempts by European nobility, at the behest of successive popes, to reinforce the Latin kingdom or regain territory lost to Islam, that give the illusion of multiple invasions. Battles would continue to be fought, cities would be won and lost, but the great Christian victories of the First Crusade would not be repeated.

During the seventh and eighth centuries, Islam swept out of the Near East, across North Africa, and into Spain, where it began to encroach on central Europe. During the 10th century, European Christianity went on the offensive, and by the 11th century, the tide began to turn against Islam. Christian Europe meant not only to overthrow Muslim rule but also to expel it from Europe and recover Jerusalem for Christianity.

Italian city-states exercised naval and commercial dominance, and the German empire was on the rise. Christianity was spreading into northern Europe, and the number of pilgrimages to the Holy Land and other sacred sites increased. The desire to spread the gospel was mixed with a desire to open new markets and conquer new territories. Despite the opportunity for war with the Muslims, the feudal barons of central Europe engaged in private wars with one another. The need for peace compelled the pope to declare the Peace of God, and later the Truce of God, in a vain attempt to limit such conflict.

By 1095, the power and influence of the papacy, as well as the sanctity of the majority of the clergy, were on the decline, while the power and influence of the German empire were on the rise. Pope Urban II, fearing the Church would lose what little influence it had, and abhorring the results of continued infighting among the Christian nobility, sought a way to unite Christendom in a common cause. At the Council of Clermont, he preached the First Crusade. It was a mixture of propaganda concerning the alleged cruelty of Muslims to Christian pilgrims; a request for aid by Byzantine emperor Alexius I Comnenus; a call for display of righteous action in the recovery of Jerusalem; and an offer of remission of sins for those who participated.

The effect was overwhelming. Not only did the nobility—his prime audience—heed Urban's call, but so did many peasants and riffraff of the cities. Others also took to preaching the crusade, most notably Peter the Hermit, whose call went mostly to peasants and street rabble. The nobility were led by Godfrey of Bouillon, Raymond of Toulouse, and Bohemond I. Along with the peasants and rabble, they made up six hosts of 100,000 to 200,000 cruciata, or cross-signed, who traveled overland to meet in Constantinople before continuing on to
Jerusalem.

The so-called Peasants' Crusade led by Peter the Hermit consisted primarily of peasants and petty criminals. It preceded the main contingents of nobility and men-at-arms and turned into a binge of pillage, thievery, and eventual widespread murder of innocent Jews. Many of Peter's "army" died at the hands of the Turks, only a few ever reaching Constantinople.

The main forces under command of the nobility reached Constantinople in 1096. The leaders were required to swear allegiance to Alexius, emperor of the Byzantine Empire, in return for immediate gifts and a promise of future help, which was never forthcoming. Alexius' main objective was to get the crusaders to help him regain territories lost to the Turks, who were seeking to take over his empire. Before they were allowed to leave for Jerusalem, however, the crusaders were coerced into helping Emperor Alexius capture the city of Nicaea in 1097.

The Muslim world was totally unprepared for the Christian invasion; the strength and power of the mounted knights, as well as the bravery of the common foot soldier, were more than a match for the Muslim cavalry. The march to Palestine was marked by a decisive victory at the Battle of Dorylaeum and the conquest of Tarsus by Baldwin I and Tancred. The crusaders and their camp followers were not prepared, however, for the long and arduous march through the Black Mountains toward Antioch. This journey meant the death of many through hunger, thirst, and heat.

Antioch fell to the crusaders in the Battle of Antioch in 1098 after eight months, despite poor provisions and ill health among the besiegers. The crusaders' confidence in the leadership of their God and the righteousness of their cause helped them to overcome numerous attempts by the inhabitants to break the siege and defeat reinforcements attempting to relieve the city. Antioch finally fell, after betrayal by one of its citizens. The crusaders spent the next several months in Antioch recuperating, making local conquests, and repelling Turkish attempts to regain the city. Bohemond finally secured Antioch for himself as the others continued on to Jerusalem.

Tales of the seeming invincibility of the Christian army preceded it, and the march toward Bethlehem and Jerusalem was without incident. God, it seemed, was surely guiding and protecting the crusaders, and no one dared stand in their way. They reached Jerusalem in 1099 and immediately placed it under siege. It fell to Godfrey and Raymond on July 15. For several days, any Muslims who could be found were put to death.

After the 1099 siege of Jerusalem and the securing of the surrounding territory, most of the crusaders returned home, feeling that they had done what was required of them by their God and their pope. Only the adventurers stayed on to establish the four Crusader States. These four states, the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the vassal states of the County of Edessa, Principality of Antioch, and eventually the County of Tripoli, were islands of Christianity in a hostile sea of Islam.

The Muslim world was now much more aware of the crusaders' presence and purpose, their strengths and weaknesses. The Muslims wasted little time in trying to regain what had been taken from them. Communications between the four Crusader States was difficult, if not impossible, and the Christians' only hope of survival lay in reinforcements from Europe. In the meantime, however, their strength, bravery, audacity, and faith would have to keep them alive and in possession of the holy sites and the fortified cities.

The Second Crusade was preached by the pope and Bernard of Clairvaux after the fall of Edessa in 1144 to Zangi, governor of Mosul. This crusade was led by Louis VII of France and Conrad III of Germany during 1147-1149. The two armies were unable to cooperate and were separately defeated in Asia Minor. An attempt to capture Damascus failed, and the crusaders returned home.
Muslim power was consolidated under Zangi, his son Nur al-Din, and later Saladin, who sought a holy war with Christianity. In 1187, Saladin's army captured Jerusalem. This caused the pope to preach the Third Crusade of 1189-1192. It was led by Philip II Augustus of France, Richard the Lionhearted of England, and Holy Roman emperor Frederick I Barbarossa. Frederick drowned in Asia Minor, and Philip and Richard were unable to work together because of jealousy. Philip returned home and left Richard in the Holy Land; Richard won the siege of Acre but was unable to recapture Jerusalem. The best he could manage was a treaty with Saladin to allow safe passage for pilgrims visiting Jerusalem.

In 1198, Pope Innocent III's influence finally brought peace to the feuding nobility of Europe, and he tried to reestablish the Fourth Crusade as a holy cause. This crusade was led mainly by the Venetians, whose only goal was to expand their trading empire by destroying the influence of Constantinople. This they did with the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by the crusaders, whom the Venetians had starved into compliance after they could not afford their passage to the Holy Land.

In 1215, Innocent III proclaimed the Fifth Crusade of 1218–1221. Emperor Frederick II of Germany obtained the title of king of Jerusalem by marriage in 1225 but was excommunicated in 1227 for delaying his start. In 1228, Frederick finally went to the Holy Land in the Sixth Crusade, gaining Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth, and a connecting strip of land to Acre—by treaty, not by conquest.

In 1244, Jerusalem fell to the Muslims, and a new crusade was proclaimed by Innocent IV in 1245. This Seventh Crusade was led by Louis IX of France during 1248-1254. Though he invaded Egypt and captured Damietta, Louis was taken prisoner, and Damietta was lost. Egypt revolted, and a new Muslim movement called for the recovery of Syria. Within the next few years, all remaining Christian possessions in Syria were captured.

The Crusades effectively came to an end after the Seventh Crusade, but some continued to fight. In 1269, King James of Aragon in Spain reluctantly launched the Aragonese Crusade under pressure from the pope. James was driven off by heavy storms and failed in his attempt to land in Asia Minor. In 1270, Louis IX renewed his crusade with the Eighth Crusade. Instead of going to the Holy Land directly, he sailed to Tunis, on the mistaken information that the ruler there was interested in converting to Christianity. When that proved incorrect, Louis laid siege. An epidemic killed a large part of the invading force, including Louis. His brother negotiated some tribute and left.

Peter I of Cyprus began a crusade in 1365 that lasted until 1369. This crusade consisted of harassment of the Muslim Mediterranean coast and the 1365 capture of Alexandria. It ended with Peter's assassination. In 1396, Pope Boniface IX called for the Crusade of Nicopolis, to halt Muslim expansion in the Balkans. French knights made up the bulk of the force that responded, but they were soundly defeated by the Turks at Nicopolis in Bulgaria.

The Last Crusade was fought during 1443–1444. King Ladislas of Poland organized a group of Hungarians, Poles, Bosnians, Wallachians, and Serbians to expel the Muslims under Murat II from the Balkans. A Venetian fleet was to ferry the crusaders from Varna to Constantinople and then stop any Muslim reinforcements from crossing the Bosporus. The fleet failed, and Murat's army crushed the crusaders at the Battle of Varna. The Crusades were definitively over.

The major military goals of the Crusades—driving Muslims from the Holy Land and imposing Western culture on the captured territory—were never accomplished. On the contrary, the Crusades strengthened and united the Islamic world and weakened the Byzantine Empire until it was overcome by the Turks in the 15th century. They succeeded, however, in accomplishing Pope Urban II's original goals of returning the papacy to its previous position of power and influence and eventually ending feudal warfare.

In the Near East, the influence of Europe remained for some time to come. Italian merchants were able to
establish trading privileges in the major ports of Acre and Tyre. By controlling the sea lanes of the Mediterranean Sea, they provided Muslim merchants with access to European goods while remaining the sole distributors of Asian goods to the West. Italian traders were able to move and work freely in dedicated districts of these cities and gained some legal control over citizens and visitors within those districts. Their basic problem was that though they provided a conduit to the West, they could deal only with Muslim traders who handled Asian goods, mainly spices.

The long-term consequences of the Crusades for the West were generally negative, as the high cost of foreign warfare impoverished the aristocracy. The population of Europe was depleted, and the Catholic Church lost much of its stature after successive defeats. In spite of its decreasing influence over the crusaders, however, the Church enjoyed a power rarely exercised before or since. Unfortunately, the power corrupted. The sale of indulgences and the exaction of tithes led away from spirituality and into worldliness, which people like Martin Luther would later use as justification for the Protestant Reformation.

There were some positive aspects for Europe, however. A sense of unity prevailed for a time under the banner of the Church. France, a struggling set of dukedoms and principalities, began unifying into a single country, although it would be fought over by internal and external factions for a long time to come. Although the Knights Templar and Knights Hospitaler suffered a severe decline, the Teutonic Knights (another military order of monks) went to work fighting the Church's enemies in Eastern Europe and in so doing, laid the foundations for the countries of both Poland and Germany.

The Crusades had a profound effect on commerce and trade, both inside and outside Europe. Feudalism and serfdom disintegrated. A money economy began to predominate, which stimulated a need for banks. Spheres of influence were set up in port cities of Palestine by the trading powers of Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, providing easier acquisition of goods from both the Near and Far East. Navigation and shipbuilding improved with the increased need for transportation of people and goods. But many of the developments attributed to the Crusades were merely the end result of changes that had begun before Pope Urban's call to retake the Holy Land. The Crusades served only to facilitate and accelerate them.


**MLA Citation**