



Part II

THE CRUSADES

Chapter 10



WHY THE CRUSADES WERE CALLED

The Crusaders' sack of Jerusalem in 1099, according to journalist Amin Maalouf in *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, was the “starting point of a millennial hostility between Islam and the West.”¹ Islamic scholar and apologist John Esposito is a bit more expansive—he blames the Crusades (“so-called holy wars”) in general for disrupting a pluralistic civilization: “Five centuries of peaceful coexistence elapsed before political events and an imperial-papal power play led to centuries-long series of so-called holy wars that pitted Christendom against Islam and left an enduring legacy of misunderstanding and distrust.”²

Maalouf doesn't seem to consider whether “millennial hostility” may have begun with the Prophet Muhammad's veiled threat, issued over 450 years before the Crusaders entered Jerusalem, to neighboring non-Muslim leaders to “embrace Islam and you will be safe.”³ Nor does he discuss the possibility that Muslims may have stoked that “millennial hostility” by seizing Christian lands—which amounted to two-thirds of what had formerly been the Christian world—centuries before the Crusades. Esposito's “five centuries of peaceful coexistence” were exemplified, he says, by the Muslim conquest of Jerusalem in 638: “churches and the Christian population were left unmolested.”⁴ But he doesn't mention Sophronius' Christmas sermon for 634, when he complained of the Muslims'

Guess what?

- ◆ The Crusades were *not* acts of unprovoked aggression by Europe against the Islamic world, but were a delayed response to centuries of Muslim aggression, which grew fiercer than ever in the eleventh century.
- ◆ These were wars for the recapture of Christian lands and the defense of Christians, *not* religious imperialism.
- ◆ The Crusades were not called in order to convert Muslims or anyone else to Christianity by force.

“savage, barbarous, and bloody sword” and of how difficult that sword had made life for the Christians.⁵

PC Myth: The Crusades were an unprovoked attack by Europe against the Islamic world

Wrong. The conquest of Jerusalem in 638 stood at the beginning of centuries of Muslim aggression, and Christians in the Holy Land faced an escalating spiral of persecution. A few examples: Early in the eighth century, sixty Christian pilgrims from Amorium were crucified; around the same time, the Muslim governor of Caesarea seized a group of pilgrims

from Iconium and had them all executed as spies—except for a small number who converted to Islam; and Muslims demanded money from pilgrims, threatening to ransack the Church of the Resurrection if they didn’t pay. Later in the eighth century, a Muslim ruler banned displays of the cross in Jerusalem. He also increased the anti-religious tax (jizya) that Christians had to pay and forbade Christians to engage in religious instruction of others, even their own children.

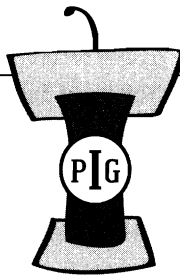
Brutal subordination and violence became the rules of the day for Christians in the Holy Land. In 772, the caliph al-Mansur ordered the hands of Christians and Jews in Jerusalem to be stamped with a distinctive symbol. Conversions to Christianity were dealt with particularly harshly. In 789, Muslims beheaded a

Muhammad vs. Jesus

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus (Matthew 5:8–10)

“Allah assigns for a person who participates in (holy battles) in Allah’s Cause and nothing causes him to do so except belief in Allah and His Messengers, that he will be recompensed by Allah either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr).”⁶



monk who had converted from Islam and plundered the Bethlehem monastery of Saint Theodosius, killing many more monks. Other monasteries in the region suffered the same fate. Early in the ninth century, the persecutions grew so severe that large numbers of Christians fled to Constantinople and other Christian cities. More persecutions in 923 saw additional churches destroyed, and in 937, Muslims went on a Palm Sunday rampage in Jerusalem, plundering and destroying the Church of Calvary and the Church of the Resurrection.⁷

In reaction to this persecution of Christians, the Byzantines moved from a defensive policy toward the Muslims to the offensive position of trying to recapture some of their lost territories. In the 960s, General Nicephorus Phocas (a future Byzantine emperor) carried out a series of successful campaigns against the Muslims, recapturing Crete, Cilicia, Cyprus, and even parts of Syria. In 969, he recaptured the ancient Christian city of Antioch. The Byzantines extended this campaign into Syria in the 970s.⁸

In Islamic theology, if any land has ever belonged to the House of Islam, it belongs forever—and Muslims must wage war to regain control over it. In 974, faced with a string of losses to the Byzantines, the Abbasid (Sunni) caliph in Baghdad declared jihad. This followed yearly jihad campaigns against the Byzantines launched by Saif al-Dawla, ruler of the Shi'ite Hamdanid dynasty in Aleppo from 944 to 967. Saif al-Dawla appealed to Muslims to fight the Byzantines on the pretext that they were taking lands that belonged to the House of Islam. This appeal was so successful that Muslim warriors from as far off as Central Asia joined the jihads.⁹

However, Sunni/Shi'ite disunity ultimately hampered Islamic jihad efforts, and in 1001 the Byzantine emperor Basil II concluded a ten-year truce with the Fatimid (Shi'ite) caliph.¹⁰

Basil, however, soon learned that to conclude such truces was futile. In 1004, the sixth Fatimid caliph, Abu 'Ali al-Mansur al-Hakim (985–1021), turned violently against the faith of his Christian mother and uncles (two of whom were patriarchs), ordering the destruction of

churches, the burning of crosses, and the seizure of church property. He moved against the Jews with similar ferocity. Over the next ten years, thirty thousand churches were destroyed, and untold numbers of Christians converted to Islam simply to save their lives. In 1009, al-Hakim gave his most spectacular anti-Christian order: He commanded that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem be destroyed, along with several other churches (including the Church of the Resurrection). The Church of the Holy Sepulcher, rebuilt by the Byzantines in the seventh century after the Persians burned an earlier version, marks the traditional site of Christ's burial; it also served as a model for the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Al-Hakim commanded that the tomb within be cut down to the bedrock. He ordered Christians to wear heavy crosses around their necks (and for Jews, heavy blocks of wood in the shape of a calf). He piled on other humiliating decrees, culminating in the order that they accept Islam or leave his dominions.¹¹

The erratic caliph ultimately relaxed his persecution of non-Muslims and even returned much of the property he had seized from the Church.¹² A partial cause of al-Hakim's changed attitude was probably his increasingly tenuous connection to Islamic orthodoxy. In 1021, he disappeared under mysterious circumstances; some of his followers proclaimed him divine and founded a sect based on this mystery and other esoteric teachings of a Muslim cleric, Muhammad ibn Isma'il al-Darazi (after whom the Druze sect is named).¹³ Thanks to al-Hakim's change of policy, which continued after his death, the Byzantines were allowed to rebuild the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in 1027.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Christians were in a precarious position, and pilgrims remained under threat. In 1056, the Muslims expelled three hundred Christians from Jerusalem and forbade European Christians from entering the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.¹⁵ When the fierce and fanatical Seljuk Turks swept down from Central Asia, they enforced a new Islamic rigor, making life increasingly difficult for both native Christians and pil-

grims (whose pilgrimages they blocked). After they crushed the Byzantines at Manzikert in 1071 and took the Byzantine emperor Romanus IV Diogenes prisoner, all of Asia Minor was open to them, and their advance was virtually unstoppable. In 1076, they conquered Syria; in 1077, Jerusalem. The Seljuk emir Atsiz bin Uwaq promised not to harm the inhabitants of Jerusalem, but once his men had entered the city, they murdered three thousand people.¹⁶ The Seljuks established the sultanate of Rum (Rome, referring to the New Rome, Constantinople) in Nicaea that same year, perilously close to Constantinople itself; from there they continued to threaten the Byzantines and harass the Christians all over their new domains.

The Christian empire of Byzantium, which before Islam's wars of conquest had ruled over a vast expanse including southern Italy, North Africa, the Middle East, and Arabia, was reduced to little more than Greece. It looked as if its death at the hands of the Seljuks was imminent. The Church of Constantinople considered the popes schismatic and had squabbled with them for centuries, but the new emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081–1118), swallowed his pride and appealed for help. And that is how the First Crusade came about: It was a response to the Byzantine Emperor's call for help.

PC Myth: The Crusades were an early example of the West's predatory imperialism

Predatory imperialism? Hardly. Pope Urban II, who called for the First Crusade at the Council of Clermont in 1095, was calling for a defensive action—one that was long overdue. As he explained, he was calling for the Crusade because without any defensive action, “the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked” by the Turks and other Muslim forces. After admonishing his flock to keep peace among themselves, he turned their attention to the East:

For your brethren who live in the east are in urgent need of your help, and you must hasten to give them the aid which has often been promised them. For, as the most of you have heard, the Turks and Arabs have attacked them and have conquered the territory of Romania [the Greek empire] as far west as the shore of the Mediterranean and the Hellespont, which is called the Arm of St. George. They have occupied more and more of the lands of those Christians, and have overcome them in seven battles. They have killed and captured many, and have destroyed the churches and devastated the empire. If you permit them to continue thus for awhile with impunity, the faithful of God will be much more widely attacked by them. On this account I, or rather the Lord, beseech you as Christ's heralds to publish this everywhere and to persuade all people of whatever rank, foot-soldiers and knights, poor and rich, to carry aid promptly to those Christians and to destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends. . . . Moreover, Christ commands it.¹⁷

Note that the pope says nothing about conversion or conquest. A call to “destroy that vile race from the lands of our friends” falls harshly on modern ears; however, it was not an exhortation for mass extermination, but one to remove Islamic rule from lands that had been Christian. Another summary of the pope's speech at Clermont reports that Urban spoke of an “imminent peril threatening you and all the faithful which has brought us hither.”

From the confines of Jerusalem and from the city of Constantinople a grievous report has gone forth and has repeatedly been brought to our ears; namely, that a race from the kingdom of the Persians, an accursed race, a race wholly alienated from God, “a generation that set not their heart aright and whose spirit was not steadfast with God,” violently invaded the lands

Just Like Today: Defenders of Islam?

In Islamic law, jihad is obligatory whenever a Muslim territory is attacked: “When non-Muslims invade a Muslim country or near to one, . . . jihad is personally obligatory upon the inhabitants of that country, who must repel the non-Muslims with whatever they can.”¹⁸

The call to jihad has occurred throughout the history of Islam. When the Hamdanid ruler Seyf al-Dawla waged annual jihad campaigns against the Byzantines in the mid-tenth century, Muslims came from far and wide to participate. They came because, in their view, the Byzantines were waging aggressive wars to seize Muslim lands. Later, during the First Crusade, a poet exhorted Muslims to respond: “Do you not owe an obligation to God and Islam, defending thereby young men and old? Respond to God! Woe to you! Respond!”¹⁹ The venerable Islamic jurist most beloved of today’s jihadists, Ibn Taymiyya (Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, 1263–1328) considered jihad an absolute: “If the enemy wants to attack the Muslims, then repelling him becomes a duty for all those under attack and for the others in order to help them.”²⁰

Some other examples of calls to jihad during the last hundred years: In 1914, the Ottoman caliph Sultan Mehmet V issued a *fatwa* (religious ruling) calling for jihad at the outbreak of World War I; in 2003, a Chechen jihadist group announced: “When the enemy entered a territory, a city or a village where Muslims are living, then everybody is obligated to go to war;”²¹ in 2003, the Islamic Center for Research at Al-Azhar University in Cairo issued a declaration: “It is in accordance with logic and with Islamic religious law that if the enemy raids the land of the Muslims, Jihad becomes an individual’s commandment, applying to every Muslim man and woman, because our Muslim nation will be subject to a new Crusader invasion targeting the land, honor, belief, and homeland;”²² and when Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, the notorious London-based jihadist imam, said in late 2002, “when the enemy enters Muslim land, such as Palestine, Chechnya, Kosova [sic] or Kashmir,” “all Muslims living within travelling distance of the aggression” must fight, with all possible support from Muslims worldwide.²³

of those Christians and has depopulated them by pillage and fire. They have led away a part of the captives into their own country, and a part have they have killed by cruel tortures. They have either destroyed the churches of God or appropriated them for the rites of their own religion. They destroy the altars, after having defiled them with their uncleanness. . . . The



Just Like Today: Jihadists from all over

As they have done throughout history, Muslim warriors travel long distances in order to participate in the latest jihads. In the 1990s, the Balkans became a favored destination for veterans of the jihad wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya. A prominent jihad commander in Bosnia, Abu Abdel Aziz, explained that he went there after meeting with several Islamic authorities in Saudi Arabia. They “all support,” he said, “the religious dictum that ‘the fighting in Bosnia is a fight to make the word of Allah supreme and protect the chastity of Muslims.’ It is because Allah said (in his holy book), ‘Yet, if they ask you for succor against religious persecution, it is your duty to give [them] this succor.’ (Lit. ‘to succor them in religion,’ Qur’an, al-Anfal, 8:72). It is then our (religious) duty to defend our Muslim brethren wherever they are, as long as they are persecuted because they are Muslims and not for any other reason.”²⁴

Before, during, and after the 2003 war in Iraq, jihadists streamed into that country from all over the world—including some unexpected places; a German security official noted in late 2003 that “since the end of the war, there has been a large movement of people motivated by Islamic extremism from Germany and the rest of Europe toward Iraq.”²⁵

kingdom of the Greeks is now dismembered by them and has been deprived of territory so vast in extent that it could be traversed in two months' time. . . . This royal city, however, situated at the center of the earth, is now held captive by the enemies of Christ and is subjected, by those who do not know God, to the worship the heathen. She seeks, therefore, and desires to be liberated and ceases not to implore you to come to her aid. From you especially she asks succor, because as we have already said, God has conferred upon you above all other nations great glory in arms.²⁶

The pope's call invoked the Muslim destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher: "Let the holy sepulcher of our Lord and Saviour, which is possessed by unclean nations, especially arouse you, and the holy places which are now treated with ignominy and irreverently polluted with the filth of the unclean."²⁷

The Crusades came together as pilgrimages: Christians from Europe made their way to the Holy Land for religious purposes, with the intention to defend themselves if their way was blocked and they were attacked. Many took religious vows. Particularly at the outset, many soldiers left for the Holy Land—and most of the participants in this "People's Crusade" were unceremoniously massacred by the Turks in Western Asia Minor in August 1096.

PC Myth: The Crusades were fought by Westerners greedy for gain

Of course, not every Crusader's motives were pure. More than once, many fell from the high ideals of Christian pilgrims. But the PC dogma that the Crusades were unprovoked, imperialist actions against a peaceful, indigent Muslim population is simply historically inaccurate and reflects distaste for Western civilization rather than genuine historical research.

Pope Urban didn't envision the Crusades as a chance for gain. He decreed that lands recovered from the Muslims would belong to Alexius Comnenus and the Byzantine Empire. The pope saw the Crusades as an act of sacrifice rather than profit.²⁸

Crusading was, in fact, prohibitively expensive. Crusaders sold their property to raise money for their long journey to the Holy Land, and did so knowing they might not return.

A typical example of a Crusader was Godfrey of Bouillon, the Duke of Lower Lorraine, and one of the more prominent European lords who "took the cross" (as joining the Crusade was known). He sold off many properties in order to finance his trip, but he clearly planned to come home, rather than settle in the Middle East, because he did not give up his title or all his holdings.²⁹

Recent studies of Crusaders' documents reveal that the vast majority of them were not "second sons" looking for a profit and estates in the Middle East. Most were, like Godfrey, lords of their own estates, men with a great deal to lose.³⁰ Certainly some Crusaders did very well for themselves after the First Crusade. Fulcher of Chartres writes, "Those who were poor there, here God makes rich. Those who had few coins, here possess countless besants; and those who had not had a villa, here, by the gift of God, already possess a city."³¹ But most who did return to Europe came back with nothing material to show for their efforts.

PC Myth: The Crusades were fought to convert Muslims to Christianity by force

To hear some PC types tell it, the Crusaders swept into the Middle East, swords in hand, and set about killing every "infidel" they saw, except those they forced to convert to Christianity. But this is lurid, politically motivated fantasy. Glaringly absent from every report about Pope Urban's address at the Council of Claremont is any command to convert Muslims. The pope's only preoccupation is to defend Christian pilgrims and recap-

ture Christian lands. It was not until over a hundred years after the First Crusade (in the thirteenth century) that European Christians made any organized attempt to convert Muslims to Christianity, when the Franciscans began missionary work among Muslims in lands held by the Crusaders. This effort was largely unsuccessful.

When the Crusaders were victorious and established kingdoms and principalities in the Middle East, they generally let the Muslims in their domains live in peace, practice their religion freely, build new mosques and schools, and maintain their own religious tribunals. Some have compared their status to that of the dhimmis in Muslim lands; they retained a certain measure of autonomy, but were subject to unfavorable taxation rates and other restrictions. It is likely that the Crusaders adopted some of the dhimmi laws already in place, but they did not subject Jews or Muslims to dress codes. So Jews and Muslims could avoid day-to-day discrimination and harassment.³² This was the opposite of Muslim practice. The key difference is that the dhimma was never part of Christian doctrine and law, as it has been and remains part of Islam.

What's more, the Spanish Muslim Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), who traversed the Mediterranean on his way to Mecca in the early 1180s, found that Muslims had it better in the lands controlled by the Crusaders than they did in Islamic lands. Those lands were more orderly and better managed than those under Muslim rule, so that even Muslims preferred to live in the Crusader realms:

Upon leaving Tibnin (near Tyre), we passed through an unbroken skein of farms and villages whose lands were efficiently cultivated. The inhabitants were all Muslims, but they live in



A Book You're Not Supposed to Read

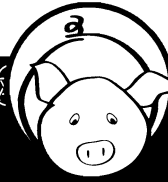
The New Concise History of the Crusades by Thomas F. Madden; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005, is a briskly told page-turner that dispels innumerable PC myths about why the Crusades were fought, who fought them, and what happened during each one.

comfort with the Franj [Franks, or Crusaders]—may God preserve them from temptation! Their dwellings belong to them and all their property is unmolested. All the regions controlled by the Franj in Syria are subject to this same system: the landed domains, villages, and farms have remained in the hands of the Muslims. Now, doubt invests the heart of a great number of these men when they compare their lot to that of their brothers living in Muslim territory. Indeed, the latter suffer from the injustice of their coreligionists, whereas the Franj act with equity.³³

So much for the contention that the Crusaders were barbarians attacking a far superior and more advanced civilization.

"May Allah rip out his spine from his back and split his brains in two, and then put them both back, and then do it over and over again. Amen."

—"praise" for the author on RevivingIslam.com



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- ❖ The Crusades were defensive conflicts
- ❖ Muslim persecution of Christians has continued for 13 centuries—and still goes on



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- ❁ What is known today as the “Islamic world” was created by a series of brutal conquests of non-Muslim lands
- ❁ The Crusades were not acts of unprovoked aggression by Europe against the Islamic world, but a delayed response to centuries of Muslim aggression
- ❁ The jihad continues today: Europe could be Islamic by the end of the twenty-first century
- ❁ Ex-Muslims must live in fear even in the United States

Everything (well, almost everything) you know about Islam and the Crusades is wrong

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Robert Spencer is the director of Jihad Watch and an Adjunct Fellow with the Free Congress Foundation. He is the author of four books on Islam, including *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World’s Fastest Growing Faith* (Encounter) and *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West* (Regnery), as well as eight monographs and hundreds of articles. He lives in a Secure, Undisclosed Location.

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