

48. THE CRUSADES (2) DOES GOD WILL IT?

The first great crusade, under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon, was not the only one. We know that the first group conquered Jerusalem during that expedition. However, Godfrey of



Godfried the Bouillon.
1060-1100 Wikipedia

Bouillon firmly refused to be called a king and to wear the king's crown. But his successors did allow themselves to be called kings. The kingdom of Jerusalem did not have an easy time. The Turks kept on

trying to recapture that city. Each time the situation in the Far East became too precarious, the Roman clergy would preach a new crusade. The official number of crusades is seven, yet there have been many more. Those crusades have been a series of failures yet lasted almost two hundred years. We cannot tell you about them all but will discuss a few of the more significant events.

THE SECOND CRUSADE

To protect the tiny kingdom of Jerusalem, the crusaders established several additional small Christian states in the East. They could support each other through the many difficulties. The name of the most Northern state was Edessa.

In 1144 the Seljuks recaptured Edessa. That made things very dangerous for Jerusalem as through this, they lost one of their most important points of support.

When the news of the loss of Edessa reached Western Europe, it caused a huge commotion. Again the Roman Catholic crusade preachers travelled through the European countries. Again, thousands of people prepared themselves for a trip to the Holy Land. German and French knights, with their subordinates, as well as many others, marched to war. They would soon recapture Edessa!

However, it was not as easy as they thought! That second crusade turned out to be a total failure! Again they lost thousands of precious human lives.



In the meantime, the knights left in the East were waging a desperate war against the invading Turks.

In 1187 the Egyptian sultan Saladin conquered Jerusalem. Saladin permitted the brave defenders



Egyptian Sultan Saladin
Wikidata.org

of Jerusalem to leave freely and even provided ships to carry them to the Italian city of Venice.

But Saladin did not allow any

pilgrims to *stay* in Jerusalem. He turned the Christian churches into mosques, and the Turks destroyed all the other holy places of the Christians.

This devastation caused great resentment in Europe.

They would not tolerate that!
That had to change!

THE THIRD CRUSADE

So, for the third time, the Roman clergy preached the necessity of a crusade. Three powerful rulers prepared to go. The emperor of Germany and his army would go by land. The kings of England and France travelled by sea with their armies. In that way, they could attack Palestine from two sides at the same time. They did not doubt the success of this expedition. They organised and prepared everything to the last detail. This crusade was especially a campaign of knights who wanted to avenge their former defeats.

And? What was the end of that well-prepared expedition? This third great crusade was also a complete failure. The emperor of Germany drowned in a small river that flowed through Asia

Minor. So the army tragically lost its excellent commander. The kings of England and France, travelling by sea, constantly quarrelled and worked against each other instead of together. So they did not achieve very much at all!

Jerusalem remained in the hands of the Turks. The crusaders did not achieve what they had set out to do. Failure was becoming a refrain!

It is incredible that time after time, despite all disappointments, thousands and thousands of people, both knights and citizens, were keen to travel to Canaan.

But times were completely different then. Those people imagined that they were performing good works. Had not the pope promised a complete remission of sins to all who marched? Many hoped to earn their ticket to heaven by joining a crusade.

Besides, severe famine reigned in various places. Appalling epidemics stalked about taking many victims.

Terrible floods ravaged entire regions, drowning thousands.

The people believed that God was coming back very soon!

It was clear that God's judgments were weighing heavy on Europe.

The people tried to avoid those judgments by going on a crusade. They imagined that that would help them.

THE FRENCH CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

Somewhere in France, a shepherd boy wanders over the fields. He is tending a flock of sheep. He does not have to work very hard and has lots of time to think and dream. One day he comes home with an incredible story. The Lord Jesus had appeared to him, and commanded that the *children* must undertake a crusade, which will be successful. Had not the Lord Jesus Himself said: "Let the children come unto Me?"

So, the children must go on a crusade. God Himself will march into battle with them and terrify the enemy. *They* will be successful where heavily armed knights and hundreds of thousands of brave soldiers have failed! Of course, it *will*

succeed, for isn't it the will of God? And if God wills it, He will also provide a positive outcome!

Everyone believed that fantastic story of that simple shepherd boy! In those days, the people believed everything!

And so the clergy preach another crusade, this time to the children. And the foolish parents allow their children to answer this appeal. Thousands and thousands of children, boys and girls from eight to fifteen years old, get ready to travel. Many of those poor little ones leave their parental home, never to return.

At last, the procession departs. First, the children walk to Marseilles, the large trading seaport in southern France on the Mediterranean Sea. From there, they will try to reach the Holy Land by boat. God will provide! And it seems as if they are right because they are very successful. When all those crowds of children arrive at the harbour, seven

large ships are in port, ready to sail. It couldn't be better!

The captains are very friendly and act very piously. Must these children go to Jerusalem? Sure, they can do that for them! They will take them there for free, seeing it is all for a good cause! The children embark immediately. The sooner they leave, the better. Many other pilgrims come along. Then they can pray at the grave of Jesus! No one doubts the success of *this* crusade! The crew release the ropes, and the seven ships, crammed with children, leave the harbour of Marseilles. Cheerfully, the little waves playfully ripple around the vessels. Soon the ships disappear over the horizon.

Yet, the voyage does not turn out as successful as they had at first imagined. A violent storm arises. Two ships are lost. All those on board, both young and old, drown. The five other ships managed to survive the storm. The captains sail their precious cargo straight to . . . Egypt!

To Egypt?

But that is wrong! That is not their destination! They don't want to go to Egypt, but Palestine! But those captains are unscrupulous scoundrels.

They had acted and spoken piously, but it was all pretence and hypocritical piety! When they finally sail into an Egyptian harbour, those wicked captains deliver those thousands of defenceless children to the Turks! Those Turks smirk unpleasantly and force their spoils to the slave market, where they sell those poor children as slaves. They never saw their native country again. Never returned to their parental home. Poor children!

Who can describe the suffering and misery of those children? What happened to them all? There is One Who knows.

After they unloaded their cargo, those five ships sailed out to sea again. With a wicked smile curling their lips, those captains watched the distant coastline. What do they care about the grief of those children?



The children's crusade. Science Photo Library

But the Judge of heaven and earth will avenge the atrocity they have committed. Those despicable villains, who shamefully abused the trust of those little ones, will receive their just reward.

That French children's crusade had a sad end. I purposely write: "That French crusade" because we see the same thing happening in Germany at about the same time.

THE GERMAN CHILDREN'S CRUSADE

There too, the people are infected with the same foolishness as in France. In Germany, a young chap called Nicholas, a baker's son, is the leader. And again, thousands of children listen to the foolish call to go to war against the Turkish infidels and prepare to go to the Holy Land.

Look, there they go. Full of courage and sure of a good result, those children climb the German mountains.

Meanwhile, winter arrives.
Storms howl over the tops of the mountains.

Icy snowstorms whip up the snow and blind the eyes of the children. Thousands succumb on the way from the freezing temperatures. Hundreds are smashed to pieces when they fall down steep cliffs. Eventually, a small group reaches the city of Mainz, and fortunately, the bishop of Mainz has the sense to forbid the remaining children to continue. He lovingly provides for all their needs and then arranges for others to bring them back to their parental homes.

This crusade, too, was a total failure. Most of these children never came home. They perished miserably in the wild, bleak mountains of Germany.

THE FINAL CRUSADE

Several campaigns followed these foolish children's crusades. William I, a Dutch count, undertook a crusade with Dutchmen and Frisians. He made the journey by sea and departed from Holland in 1218. So six years after the children's crusade.

On his way, the king of Portugal asked for his help against the Turks who tried to conquer Portugal. Count William decided to assist the Portuguese.

He and his army disembarked in the Portuguese harbour and succeeded in inflicting a crushing blow to the Turks. William and his men expelled those Turks from Portugal. After that, William and his victorious army continued their travels and sailed to Egypt.



Count William I. Wikidata.org

What? Egypt? Wasn't Jerusalem his destination?

Didn't he set sail to reconquer *that* city?

Yes, true, but the Egyptian sultans kept sending forces to Palestine to help the Seljuks defend Jerusalem. Count William thought:

"If I succeed in conquering Egypt, then the Egyptian sultans can't send soldiers to Jerusalem anymore. Then Jerusalem will be easy for us to conquer."

That was clever thinking! He weighed anchor just before the Egyptian port of Damietta. According to some writers, Damietta was a city of more than 87,000 inhabitants and was very strong, almost impregnable. On both sides of the entrance to the harbour stood two sturdy towers. Heavy chains were stretched between those towers and completely blocked the entrance so that it was impossible to sail into the port. William had to conquer those towers before he could remove those chains. They fought desperately for the

possession of those towers. Thousands of crusaders and Egyptians were killed in that bloody struggle. Yet bit by bit, William forced the Egyptians back. Cornered, the Egyptian sultan offered Jerusalem to count William and a part of the land of Canaan, but then he must raise the siege of Damietta. William refused. Finally, in 1219, after months of fighting, Damietta fell into the hands of the crusaders. Yet also this crusade did not have much effect because two years later, the sultan of Egypt succeeded in reconquering the city and driving the crusaders out of it.

In the Dutch city of Haarlem, there is a large church. Some small ships and clocks hang there in memory of that glorious expedition of count William I to Damietta. Louis, a French king, also undertook several crusades. However, none of them was successful.

In the meantime, the struggle in Palestine kept raging. The crusaders lost one city after another. In 1291 the city of Acre, the crusaders' last stronghold, was reconquered by the Turks. After that, the crusades stopped. They had lasted almost two hundred years. Millions lost their lives because of them. Some authors tell us that ten million people died because of the crusades.

"God wills it! God wills it!"

That cry had echoed at Clermont's great assembly at the beginning of the previous chapter. Now that cry is silent.

They had counted on God marching into battle with them. But that did not happen. Instead, they had experienced failure upon failure.

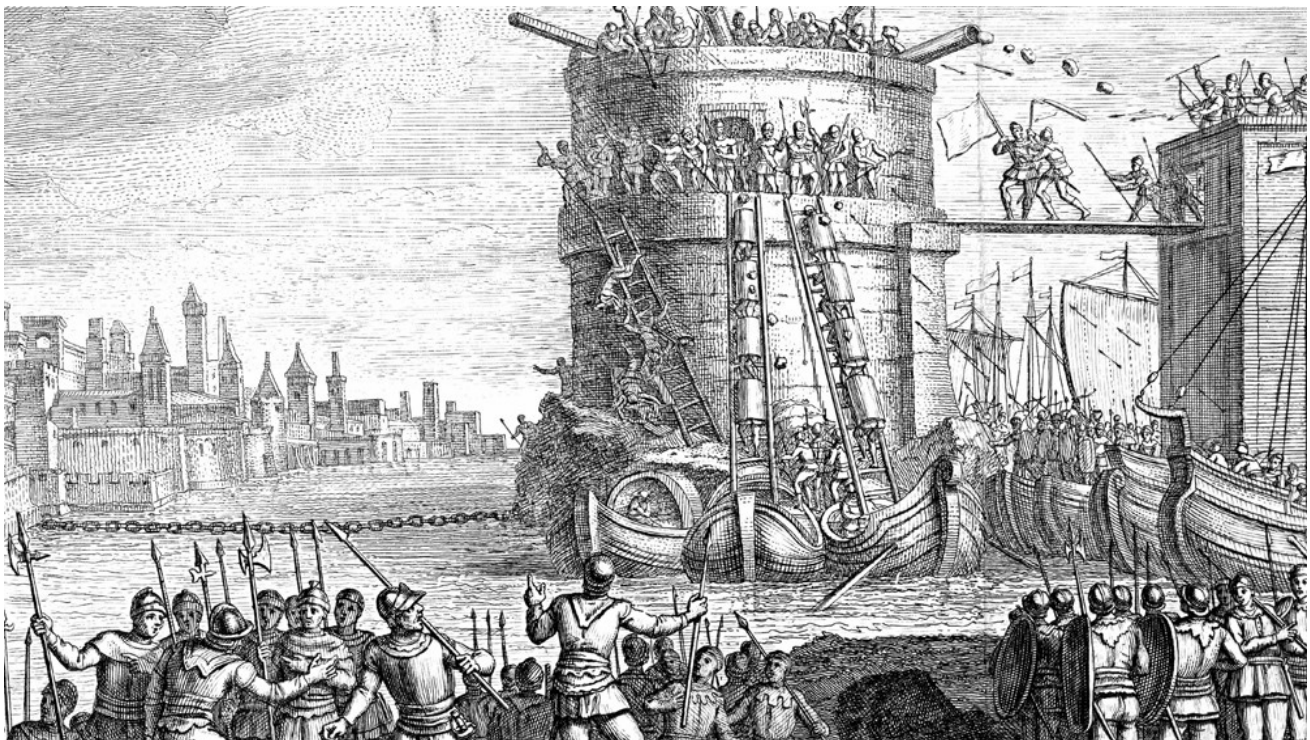
Finally, the question arose in the hearts of thousands of people:

"Does God really will it? Is it true that God wills it?" And then we must answer:

"No, God did *not* will it!"

Sure, nothing happens outside of God's *providence*. The golden thread of God's reign also runs through this history. The Almighty has *permitted* it. The Creator of heaven and earth achieved His purpose, but His goal was very different to that of the people!

The crusades were a *human* invention. The pope promoted and encouraged those expeditions for *his* benefit. He thought they would improve *his* situation and be profitable for him. That's why he supported them.



Siege of Damietta, 1228-1219. <https://www.aljazeera.com/>

And the crusaders themselves?
Undoubtedly many sincerely meant it. But tens of thousands had personal reasons for joining in. The knights wanted to obtain honour and fame. Waging war and fighting was something they liked best.

Others wanted to experience thrilling adventures. Others did it to get lots of booty, hoping to return as rich men.
The slaves went along to obtain their freedom.

Farmers and merchants hoped for the reduction of debts and taxes.
So we see that perhaps most of them were thinking of themselves and how *they* could profit!

The cry, "God wills it", was *not* true when seen from that perspective, and we must disapprove of the crusades. From every angle, they failed dismally because Jerusalem and the Holy Land remained in the hands of the Turks. But again, the reign of God continues. Also in this history, God governs and fulfils His eternal counsel because ...

QUESTIONS

1. Why were several crusades necessary?
2. Identify Edessa. Why was a second crusade launched? What was the result?
3. Identify Saladin. What changes occurred in Jerusalem?
4. What was the result of the third crusade?
5. Why did people continue to volunteer to go on crusades when so many met with failure?
6. Why did children go on a crusade?
7. What was the sad result?
8. What became of the Children's Crusade in Germany?
9. Identify William I. What did he do in Portugal?
10. Why did he go to Egypt rather than directly to Jerusalem?
11. What occurred at Damietta?

12. Why can we conclude that the crusades were the work of man?

13. List why knights, adventurers, slaves, farmers, merchants, etc., went on crusades. Were there some who went purely for religious reasons? Defend your answer.

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Why were the crusaders mistaken when they placed so much emphasis upon an earthly Jerusalem? Read Matthew 24 and Revelation 21. What conclusion should we reach regarding Jerusalem?
2. Today, there is renewed interest in Jerusalem. Thousands of Jews have returned to Israel in this century. What is their goal today? How should we view this movement?
3. Why do both Muslims and Jews compete for the "holy places" in Jerusalem today?

REVIEW

Fill in the following blanks:

1. Early journeys to the land of Canaan were called.....
2. Many believed that the Day of Judgment would come during the year...
3. Jerusalem was conquered by the in 1076.
4. A trade in fictitious occurred in Europe after people returned from Jerusalem with souvenirs.
5. Pope tore his cloak to provide pieces for people to construct crosses to wear on their right shoulders.
6. The watchword of the first crusade was
7. Peter of Amiens claimed that appeared to him while praying at the tomb.
8. He claimed that the Christians had to conquer
9. He said that the heathens had takeninheritance.

10. The pope promised of sin to those who went on the crusade.

11. were promised their freedom if they joined the crusade.

12. The French commander of the first crusade was.....

13. The emperor of the East Roman empire lived in

14. The Jews were massacred by the crusaders.

15. Wood for the storm towers was obtained in the port of

16. Godfrey refused to wear a king's crown but allowed the people to call him:

17. The oppressed northern state in the East conquered by the Seljuks in 1144, was called....

18. The Egyptian sultan conquered Jerusalem in 1187.

19. The emperor of drowned in a river in Asia Minor.

20. The Children's Crusade embarked on their journey from the French harbour of.....

21. The defenceless children were delivered to the in Egypt.

22. The leader of the Children's Crusade in Germany was

23. 'The bishop of stopped the children from going any farther.

24.organised a crusade involving Dutchmen and Frisians.

25. The last crusade ended when the last stronghold, the city of Acre, was reconquered by the Turks in

2. Write a short speech urging others to join a crusade. Remember to use the language of the times.

3. Construct a timeline on the crusades. Most historians count eight crusades plus the Children's Crusade.

RESEARCH TOPICS:

1. What conditions in Europe made it possible for the pope to create so much enthusiasm for crusades? How could so many leave their work so easily?