

47. THE CRUSADES (1) GOD WILL IT

Come, in our thoughts, we will go to Clermont, a little town in Southern France. There we find thousands and thousands of people gathered in a big open field. However, the crowd is hushed, for everyone is listening attentively to the man addressing them. That man is the pope of Rome!



Pope Urban II. World History Encyclopedia

His name is Urban II. He describes the misery in which the pious pilgrims find themselves in glowing, animated terms. They are abused and beaten. They are despised and mocked. The land of Canaan is in the hands of the infidel Seljuks. They are Lord and master there. They

trample down the places where Christ once walked.

The pope cries out to the enormous crowd: "May we tolerate this? Let us go and help our oppressed brothers in the Far East. Let us stand united and drive those foreign intruders out of the country of Canaan. We may not look on idly! *God wills it!*"

That is the message he preaches to the large crowd in the field. For a moment, it remains quiet. Then the shout erupts and swells, repeated by thousands:

"God wills it! God wills it!"

Pope Urban II continues: "Since God wills it, and our brothers are in trouble, get ready to fight and drive out the Muslims."

And then he tears his beautiful cloak into small pieces and divides them between those closest to

him. Everyone surges forward and does their utmost to get a bit of that papal cloak. They will make a cross out of it and attach it to their right shoulder. Naturally, not everyone could receive such a papal cross because there were hundreds of higher and lower members of the clergy there, and some writers tell us that about thirty thousand knights were present as well. But it doesn't matter. They can sew a linen cross for themselves and attach that to their shoulder. The enthusiasm among those thousands is tremendous. They all go back home to prepare for that long expedition to Palestine. All of them are of good courage. *God wills it*, doesn't He? The pope himself said so! Then God will also help them! They'll return as victors, laden with booty. For many, the plunder lures them most of all. All eyes sparkle with enthusiasm.



Pope Urban II returns to Rome. A smile plays around his lips. If this succeeds, his power will increase. Then, a large Christian empire shall arise over which he will rule in both West and East! Then the western and eastern churches will acknowledge, honour, and obey him as pope!



Pope Urban II orders the first Crusade. UK History Chanel

Then the mighty empire of the Muslims will collapse, and *he* will become ruler over the whole world! With these thoughts, he cheerfully travels back to Rome.

PETER OF AMIENS

A lonely monk lived near the French city of Amiens. He rarely visited the city or mingled with people, usually isolating himself in his dilapidated hut. He was known as "Peter the Hermit" or "Peter of Amiens."

But one day, his hut is closed. Peter has left. Where did he go?
He went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The Seljuks in Palestine harass him like they harassed the pilgrims in the previous chapter. They insult and abuse him. However, he endures all that abuse and finally enters the church built on Jesus' tomb. Before leaving the holy city to return home, he visits Simeon, the Christian church's patriarch and bishop in Jerusalem. Simeon gives him letters of introduction.

Letters of introduction? What for?

Peter of Amiens returns to Europe with a definite purpose because he relates that while he was praying at Jesus' tomb, the Lord appeared to him and told him that the Christians had to conquer Jerusalem from the infidel Muslims. Christ Himself commanded him to deliver that message to the countries of Western Europe.

Of course, he also told Simeon that story, so Simeon gave him letters of introduction.

We ask:
"Is that true? Did Christ *really* give him that message?" There is one answer to that question:

"What Peter broadcast everywhere was absolutely *not* true! The Lord Jesus did not appear to him."

But where did he get that story from then? He may have just invented it so that people would believe him. He may have also imagined it. The deceptions of the prince of darkness are many. But he did not receive that revelation from God. Yet Peter achieved his purpose because everyone who heard his stories believed him without asking any questions! He travels to Urban II, and the pope immediately agrees with Peter's plan. We don't know if the pope believed that the Lord Jesus appeared to Peter of Amiens. But the pope could see this as a way to increase his own power. Besides, he saw the Muslims as a great danger to Europe.

During that time, the Muslims or Turks had gained several great victories. The emperor of the East Roman empire, who lived in Constantinople, was engaged in a bitter war with the invading Mohammedans. That struggle was so severe that he even sent a message to the pope to ask for help from the Western Christian nations. Peter of Amiens came to Urban to tell him his story about Christ appearing to him at about the same time.



Peter of Amiens preaches the crusade. Media Storehouse

That's why Urban II is immediately ready for Peter's proposal. He tells that plain monk:

"Now, you must try to obtain the approval of the rulers and the people of Western Europe for a campaign to the Holy Land. Go, travel from city to city, from village to village, visit castles and fortresses everywhere you go, and preach the crusade against the infidel Turks."

A CALL TO ARMS

Look, there goes Peter. Sitting on a donkey, he travels through Italy, France, and then southwest Germany. At every village, he dismounts.

The news that a pilgrim has come to speak, quickly travels through the village by word of mouth. Burning with curiosity, the inhabitants stop working and hasten to the village square. Soon an admiring crowd surrounds Peter and stares at him in awe.

Listen! Full of anticipation, they wait for him to speak. Then Peter cries out: "Christians, gird your sword upon your thigh! Prepare yourselves for war because the heathens have taken Jacob's inheritance."

Then he paints a picture for the attentively listening crowd of the Christians' misery in the Far East. He tells them about the abuse he had to endure himself. He informs them of what God told him in the church on Jesus' tomb. His voice gets louder and more penetrating, and his eyes sparkle enthusiastically. Occasionally, he waits a moment to catch his breath, and then we feel the tension. He continues:

"The pope promises complete forgiveness of sins to everyone who comes along. God will deliver them from everlasting punishment! Do any of you fear for their possessions, which they must leave behind? Do not fear! The church will protect your possessions while you are absent. Do any of you pay high taxes? Don't worry; the pope will reduce those taxes. Do any of you have large debts you don't know how to pay off? Don't worry, don't let that stop you from going! While you are not home, you need not pay off anything!"

That is how Peter of Amiens addresses the crowds wherever he goes.

There were still many slaves and servants in those days. Peter of Amiens has good news for those unfortunate people, too. Just listen!

"Are there any among you who are in bondage? Do not fear. March to war against those infidel Muslims, and the pope promises you will receive freedom when you return. Are you afraid your wife and children will not receive the basics while you are gone? Fear not. The church will take care of your family while you are away."



Peter the Hermit Who Rode a White Mule with a Crucifix in Hand... Francesco Hayez (1791-1882)
Artrenewal.org.

Finally, Peter stops speaking. He mounts his donkey and travels on.

The crowd disperses, busily discussing all they have heard. Peter continues to travel from city to city and from village to village. He enters the strong castles of the mighty knights and nobles. Peter enters the palaces of the rulers. But he also enters the poor huts of the servants. Everywhere he brings the same message. It is not surprising that his words make a deep impression on all his listeners. They discuss his message all day, every day. He stirs up all of Western Europe.

A POSITIVE RESPONSE

After some time, word reaches the people that the pope is summoning a large church gathering at Piacenza, a village in Italy.

Thousands of clergy and tens of thousands of knights attend.
They gathered at Piacenza in March 1095.

In November of the same year, the pope called a second gathering.
This time it is held at Clermont, in France. The meeting at Clermont is even more significant than the one in Piacenza.

At Clermont, the pope cries out:
"God wills it."
Thousands adopt that slogan.



The first Crusade. Timetoast.com timelines

"God wills it! God wills it!"

That cry echoes lustily over the fields of Clermont from tens of thousands of throats. The crowds' enthusiasm is boundless. Now we know why so many people had gathered at Clermont. All of Western Europe was in a state of commotion.

Everywhere they prepare themselves for the long trek to Palestine. Knights and their soldiers leave their strong castles.

Thousands of monks attach the cross to their shoulders and leave their safe monasteries. Thousands of servants leave their ramshackle huts and begin to travel to Canaan.

When an army marches to war these days, the troops are transported in long trains or with hundreds of trucks. Or even giant aeroplanes!

But back then, it was not so easy. Trains, cars and aeroplanes did not exist yet. They travelled as fast as they could, either on horseback or by foot, to the rendezvous.

They appoint a French knight as the commander of that first great crusade. His name is *Godfrey of Bouillon*. What a heavy task that man has! He must organise thousands of people into different sections.

He must provide each unit with food and weapons. Some of them had brought their wives and children with them. He must organise and decide how everything is going to work.

It is an enormous job to arrange and regulate so many people! He must overcome lots of difficulties! That's why those preparations take months.

TOO MANY ARE IMPATIENT

Peter of Amiens is walking around grumbling. He thinks it's taking much too long. He can't and won't wait till everything is ready.

Finally, he cries out:



Godfrey of Bouillon.
British Museum.

"I'm going to go ahead! Who is going with me?"

Someone calls out:

"I will!"

A second one cries out: "I'm coming too."

Peter soon has a large army assembled because many others don't want to wait anymore either. And so the first group sets out.

They are poorly armed.
They have no money with them.
Their food supply is much too small.
But that does not matter. God will provide! Isn't it His will that they march to battle against the Turks?
Look, there they go. Those fools!
They imagine that they are heading for victory.
But they are mistaken.
They are heading for death.
They march through Austria and the Balkan countries. They steal and rob the farmers of the food they need. Plundering and robbing, that army marches on. That army? They are a pack of thieves! Thousands die on the way from exhaustion and fatigue. The farmers, angry and bitter because they are getting robbed, take vengeance and kill thousands. Only a small group finally reaches Constantinople. The emperor of the East Roman Empire advises them to wait for the large Army of the Cross. Peter of Amiens, the commander, also thinks that is the best thing to do. His army has become too small.

But some more impatient knights can't wait and start travelling before the whole group is ready.

I can only tell you some of the more important things that occurred.

The second group to leave before the main army is commanded by a man called Wouter. After having suffered terrible losses in the Baltic States, this army finally reached the city of

Constantinople. The remnants of Peter's and Wouter's army join forces, and Peter becomes the commander.

Peter thinks:

"That's great. Now we are strong enough again and don't have to wait for the large army to come."

He discusses it with Wouter, and both commanders decide to keep marching without waiting for the rest. The emperor advises them against it. He asks:
"Why don't you wait for the large army to come?"

However, Peter and Wouter do not want to listen to that well-meant advice. They cross the Bosphorus and march toward Palestine. They shout their battle cry:
"God wills it! God wills it!"

Off they go to obtain the victory!
But no, they meet death instead!
The Seljuks hear that an army of Crusaders is coming to Palestine to drive them out of the Holy Land. They march against that Christian army and...? They destroy most of the army of the Crusaders!

Dead bodies of more than 40,000 crusaders cover the battlefield. Hungry and exhausted, only a tiny group returned to Constantinople. Peter is also with them.

Other impatient knights also went ahead of the main group of crusaders, but those small armies all suffered the same fate. That was not surprising because they all had insufficient supplies, which soon made them degenerate into plundering bands. This made the angered people defend their belongings and kill the plundering crusaders.

Do you know who suffered horribly in those foolish times? The *Jews*!

The fury of the crusaders also turned itself against the Jews. Those nasty, wicked Jews! They had reviled and scorned the Lord Jesus! They had rejected the Lord Jesus and had refused to acknowledge Him as the Messiah! They had dared to deliver the Saviour to the heathen governor Pontius Pilate who condemned Him to death on the cross!

Therefore ... away with them!

Sizable Jewish groups lived in the German cities of Cologne, Mainz and Worms. The Crusaders massacred *all* those Jews. Not one was left. Isn't that terrible?

One example.

The Jewish community in Mainz consisted of 900 Jews. When the Crusaders approached the city gates, the Jews begged the bishop of Mainz for his protection. That bishop advised them to give him all their money and valuables for safekeeping. They did this, expecting him to try to save their lives. But that ended in a bitter disappointment for them! Although the bishop accepted all their gold and silver, he did not lift a finger to protect them! He allowed the Crusaders to kill them in cold blood. Those Crusaders were cruel and did terrible things to those poor Jews! Woe to those

guilty of those horrific murders committed against defenceless people.

THE FIRST 'PROPER' CRUSADE

Finally, under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon, the large army was ready to march. In the year 1096, Godfrey gave the order:

"Forward!"

And so that long journey began at last. The people cheered and sang, full of courage and optimistic about a satisfactory result.

At the start, the army counted 300,000 strong men. But as they marched, it constantly increased because strong detachments of troops kept joining them. When the towers of a city loomed up in the hazy distance, many asked in glad anticipation:

"Is that Jerusalem?"



Massacre of the Jews of Mainz during the First Crusade, by Auguste Migette. Wikipedia

Those poor people! They knew no better.
Constantly the disappointing answer was:
"No, not by a long shot!"

Occasionally somebody would drop down on the side of the road, completely exhausted and unable to walk any further. But the army marched on without worrying about him. They left him to die where he fell! They could not wait for one man. Soon another man fell, and then a third one. It went on like that continually, day after day, week after week. Godfrey had organised that large army well, far better than the former ones. They were better armed. They had sufficient supplies of food and finances. They also behaved more honourably. When those crusaders needed anything, they did not steal but bought it from the people, immediately paying for it.

The Bulgar and Rumanian farmers, who had attacked the first groups as vengeance for the robberies inflicted on them, now allowed this large army of Crusaders to pass undisturbed. They even traded with them.

Finally, they reached the large city of Constantinople. The emperor of the East Roman empire was willing to help them and get them over the Bosphorus, but he stipulated that the territory they would conquer had to become part of his empire. The commanders of the Army of the Cross agreed.

In the spring of 1097, they crossed the Bosphorus and marched through Asia Minor to Palestine.

During that march, the army suffered enormous losses.

Due to fatigue and exhaustion, thousands succumbed along the way. Besides, they constantly had to wage bitter battles with the Turkish armies trying to prevent their progress. Even though they managed to repulse the Turks time after time, the Crusaders suffered severe losses. The Turks killed or severely wounded tens of thousands of them, and their bodies remained behind wherever they fought.

Who can describe the suffering of those poor men?

Knights who had joined the crusade to obtain honour and glory never returned to their castles because their dead bodies lay as prey for the wild animals on the bloody battlefields. Servants and slaves, who had courageously joined the Army of the Cross to obtain the liberty they so fervently desired, did not reach their goal because the embittered Turkish soldiers cut them down in those distant, unknown countries. Farmers and merchants who had marched to obtain remission of debts and taxes and who hoped for a fresh start when they came back home collapsed, mortally wounded, or fell behind and died a miserable death.

It took two full years before the Army of the Cross finally saw the outline of the buildings of Jerusalem appear in the distance. Ah, the holy city!

But most of them never saw those towers because it was only a sad remnant of that immense army finally reaching Jerusalem. Sure, they had gained some magnificent victories. They had stormed and conquered many cities on the way to Jerusalem.

At times there were not enough provisions for the army. Then many went hungry. Other times they were plagued by thirst, and the heat was sweltering there! They often lacked the essentials. Other times, they had an abundance, especially when they had successfully conquered a city. But instead of being careful with their supplies, they carelessly wasted that precious food. Those fools!

It is impossible to tell you everything they experienced during that crusade. I only shared the main stories.

So, in 1099, the small remnant of the enormous Army of the Cross finally stood at the gates of the ancient city of Jerusalem. The whole army cheered enthusiastically! Many had tears of joy and thankfulness running down their faces. Some threw themselves on the ground, kissing the hard earth where the Lord Jesus had once walked. Weak, sick warriors, who had dragged themselves along with great difficulty, felt their strength return. Their eyes sparkled with courage. Others

raised their eyes to heaven as if they wanted to thank God for the favour of living to see and share in that beautiful moment.

Godfrey himself reverently uncovered his head. Although they now stood *before* Jerusalem, they were not *in* it yet! The heavy gates were firmly locked, and the walls swarmed with heavily armed Turkish soldiers who would defend the city with their lives! No, the Crusaders had not won the victory yet!

THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

Listen! A wild clamour fills the air. We hear encouraging cries, but we also hear dreadful moans. The Crusaders are storming the city. Now that they are before the gates of Jerusalem, they want to get in!

The Crusaders must and shall conquer that city at all costs! They charge! With death-defying courage, they clamber up those high walls. However, the Seljuks repulse them, causing much bloodshed.

The Crusaders try assault after assault.
The Seljuks kill thousands of them.

The Crusaders' heroism does not help. They fail to enter and take the city. Finally, the commanders say:

"This won't work. We must try something different!"

Yes, but what?

There is a way that gives them a chance to succeed. They decide to build storm towers.

Storm towers? What are they? In those days, they often used storm towers. When knights waged war with each other and laid siege against the strong castles of their opponents, they built large, sturdy towers. They made those towers as high as the castle walls under attack. The attacking army then rolled those towers against the walls of the besieged castle. There was a drawbridge on the upper story that they would drop on top of the wall. That bridge then became the connection between the storm tower and the wall of the besieged castle. Then the attackers would try to breach the wall over that bridge and beat back the defenders. However, the defenders would try to prevent that. In that way, they would fight a deadly battle high above the ground.

Well, such storm towers are also necessary here at the walls of Jerusalem. But they have a



The taking of Jerusalem during the First Crusade, 1099. Painting by Emile Signol <https://about-history.com/the-siege-of-Jerusalem>

problem. Where will they get the required materials to make a storm tower? Not to worry! They find a solution. Several wooden vessels belonging to the crusaders from Venice lie in the nearby port of Joppa. They wreck those ships, cart the boards and beams to Jerusalem, and use those materials to build the necessary storm towers. The crusaders toil for days under the burning sun to construct those towers as quickly as possible. However, everyone understands it will take weeks to get it done.

There is no source of fresh water nearby. So every day, a detachment of soldiers fetch water in jugs from the Jordan. This is heavy and tiring work. Eventually, those storm towers are ready. They have completely covered them with animal skins on the outside so the Turks cannot set fire to those towers.

They are enormous monsters, heavy and clumsy but sturdy! When they are finally ready, they view the result of their many weeks of hard work with satisfaction and pride. They have succeeded!

They put the heavy towers onto big rollers, and the assault can begin!



A medieval siege tower.

On the 15th of July, 1099, the great attack on Jerusalem began. With a combined effort, they roll those wooden towers up to the walls.

Full of a blazing, fighting spirit, the warriors climb up the towers. They

let down the drawbridges onto the wall, and then? Then a bitter struggle breaks out on those narrow bridges. Realising the danger threatening them, the Turkish soldiers try to set those towers on fire. They shoot a shower of flaming arrows at them. But the wet animal skins stop the flames from taking hold.

In the meantime, Turks and Crusaders wage a life-and-death struggle on the drawbridges. Severely wounded warriors from both sides constantly plunge over the edge. The bridge drips with blood. It is terrible!

Finally, the Crusaders succeed in scaling the wall. The Turkish defenders, still offering stubborn resistance, are forced back more and more. Eventually, they can't hold the Crusaders back anymore, and the Crusaders push their way triumphantly into the city.

But then a massacre commences, so horrible, so cruel, that I hardly dare tell you. The invaders don't spare anyone. Turkish men and women, boys and girls, babies and older people fall, struck down pitilessly by the bloody swords of the Crusaders. With a rage that spares nothing and no one, the Christians vent their hatred on the Turkish inhabitants of Jerusalem. The blood flows through the streets. They cruelly murder more than forty thousand people! When the killing stops, because there are no more to kill, the Crusaders hasten to the church to thank God for the incredible victory. They sing praises to God.

What do you think?

Did the Lord approve of this?

Was God well pleased with this?

No, not at all!

What happened in Jerusalem on that day was atrocious and wicked! On the evening of that bloody day, the Crusaders are lord and master of Jerusalem, for they have struck down all opposition. They have achieved their aim! They rejoice and shout for joy:

"God wills it! God wills it!"

There is only one answer to that. God most certainly did *not* 'will' that!

Now that they have conquered, someone must become ruler and govern Jerusalem. They all look to their commander, Godfrey of Bouillon. He must become king of the state of Jerusalem. But he replies:

"Oh no, I don't want to wear a king's crown in the same city where the Lord Jesus once wore a crown of thorns!"

He refuses! What now?

When they persist, Godfrey suggests:
"Well then, I am willing to govern the city but not as a king. Call me: 'Defender of the Holy Tomb!' "
So that's what he got called.

QUESTIONS

1. Identify Peter of Amiens. What did he say happened while he was praying at the tomb of Jesus?
2. Why did he visit Simeon? Who was Simeon?
3. Why did Pope Urban II readily agree to Peter's proposal?
4. What steps did Peter take to arouse interest in capturing Jerusalem?
5. What did Peter mean when he said, "The heathens have taken Jacob's inheritance?"
6. What five promises did the pope give to those who went to Jerusalem?
7. What promise did the pope give to the slaves and servants?
8. Why did the gathering at Clermont occur?
9. How did the cry "God wills it" affect the multitude?
10. What effect did the sign of the cross have on the people?
11. Identify Godfrey of Bouillon. What task did he have?
12. Why was Peter of Amiens dissatisfied? What did he do?
13. How did Peter's group fare on their journey?
14. Identify Wouter.
15. What advice did the emperor give Peter and Wouter? Did they follow his advice?
16. What became of their endeavours?
17. Why were the Crusaders so angry with the Jews in Mainz?
18. How did the army of Godfrey of Bouillon fare on its journey to Jerusalem?
19. How was this army different from the former ones?
20. What method did the army use to gain entrance into Jerusalem?
21. Where did they get the necessary wood? Why were the storm towers covered with animal skins?
22. Why did the massacre occur?

23. Why did Godfrey refuse to become king?
What was he willing to be?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. How do we know that Peter's revelation was a product of his imagination rather than a true revelation from God?
2. We know that God sometimes reveals His will to His people in particular circumstances. How can they distinguish between true revelation and the suggestions of Satan or the imagination of their hearts?
3. The Quakers place much emphasis on revelation. What serious error do they make regarding God's revealed will?
4. Read Deuteronomy 29:29. What does this text teach us concerning God's secret and revealed will?
5. Analyse the promises of Urban II to those who became crusaders. What obvious faults do you find in these promises?
6. Look up the meaning of 'crusader' in the dictionary. What is its usual meaning today? Why did religious leaders such as Billy Graham term their revivals as crusades?
7. What are the dangers of modern religious crusades?
8. Since God decreed that the Jews would continually be persecuted among the nations, were the crusaders responsible for their treatment of the Jews in Mainz? Explain.