

---

## The Motivations Behind The Holy Wars

The Holy Wars, also known as the Crusades have been long debated amongst historians as to what the pure motivation is to be. The commencement of the Crusades began with Pope Urban II calling the people to arms with his sermon at Clermont. The motives with the speech pointed towards the Holy Land, where many had found refuge over the years. There is a preconceived notion that the Crusades were enacted to obtain the Holy Land and to protect the faith, however, the ploy that is the Holy Wars challenges the Ten Commandments as the Christians fight to gain power and land.

Beginning on November 27th, 1095, Pope Urban II presided over his people as the Speech of Clermont was presented. Pope Urban II was not only promoting the reform and working towards removing any lay control, but was calling the people to take up arms to defend their faith. A main focal point within his speech was to gain control and settlement in the Holy Land. During the seventh century, the Muslims had taken over the region, but allowed for the Christians to continue their pilgrimages through the land. What most do not know is that the 2 Turks in the present time of 1095 had taken over the land and were committing a multitude of sacrilegious acts and crimes. As they plundered the Holy Land, the Turks destroyed the churches and altars, when the circumcisions were over they would smear the blood over the baptismal fonts as well as altars, killing people, and the morbid list continues on. This created the first glimpse of urgency amongst Pope Urban II and his people, for the army began to grow; made up of followers, clergy, servants, and soldiers. Although this fight did not begin at the hands of Pope Urban II, but it was simply him carrying out the unspoken plans of Pope Gregory VII. Going further back into history, Pope Gregory VII was in search of soldiers that had faith in God. Due to the war between the Romans and the Turks, Pope Gregory VII was looking to create an alliance with the Byzantines. A goal after the hopeful defeat of the Turks was to visit the Holy Land. As the war was progressing, Pope Gregory VII feared the negative relations between the Christians of the East and West, but hoped this quarrel would settle the papal authority. With tensions rising, Pope Gregory VII issued a decree towards the lay investiture clergy, which is later on known as the Investiture Controversy, 1075-1122. Fast-forwarding back to Pope Urban II, he gathered the goals and plans of Pope Gregory VII and carried on what he could not finish.

The Crusades lasted for roughly two hundred years; throughout this time period there was a power struggle amongst the several parties involved. Beginning in the year 1096, Pope Urban II called upon the armies to go into battle with the Turkish forces. With the four armies, they were led by Raymond of Saint-Gilles, Godfrey of Bouillon, Hugh of Vermandois, and Bohemond of Taranto. A major recruiter for the Crusader forces was Peter the Hermit, who preached and according to *The New Concise History of the Crusaders*, explains that he possessed a letter from God saying to attack the Turks in order for Him to take vengeance. Through Peter's strong influence with the French and Germans, the following base grew exponentially, which brought many different classes and backgrounds together. The four armies all gathered together at Constantinople. This particular Crusade was a costly one and the Christians could not afford to lose this battle. Emperor Alexius, in turn, went to the Byzantine Emperor, Hugh Vermandois, to form an alliance. Due to this decision Emperor Alexius made, both the Christians and the Byzantines were able to advance on Nicea and regain the land from the Turks. In addition to the victory in Nicea, they as well gained power in Antioch in 1098. This allowed for the

---

Crusaders to attack Jerusalem in 1099, once more gaining power over the land. These victories established the four states of the Crusaders, Jerusalem, Edessa, Antioch, and Tripoli.

However, in 1130, the Muslims regained control and in 1144, the Seljuk general Zangi, captures Edessa. This shocked the Christians as well as authorities in the West, hence led to the call of the Second Crusade in 1144. This war was led by both King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany as they annihilated the Muslim forces and attained another victory for the Crusaders. Proceeding into the Third Crusade, the Crusaders had set their next expedition to conquer land in Egypt. However, they were stopped in their tracks when Nur al-Din's forces led by Shirkuh had captured Cairo in 1169 further leading the Crusaders to evacuate. In 1187 Shirkuh's nephew, Saladin, commenced a campaign against the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, while his troops destroyed the Christian troops and regaining a majority of the land. With the many looming defeats hanging over the Crusaders, the Third Crusade was set into motion as it was led by rulers Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, King Philip II of France, and King Richard I of England. In 1191, Saladin's army was defeated by none other than King Richard I, allowing for him to restore Christian control over part of the region. A year later in 1192, King Richard I and Saladin had signed a peace treaty that reestablished the Kingdom of Jerusalem, hence bringing a close to the Third Crusade.

The Fourth Crusade sets up for a grand finale in the major crusades with the fall of Constantinople. In 1198, Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Crusade with the power struggle between Byzantine and Europe. This changed the motives and directions of the Crusaders as they followed the method of divide and conquer to overthrow the Byzantine Emperor, Alexius III. The new Emperor was working to submit the Byzantine Church to Rome, although there was great resistance further leading the Crusaders to call war upon Constantinople. The end of the final major Crusade was completed with the fall of Constantinople. The last major Crusade may have come to a close, but the Crusades carried on for many more years with the minor Crusades.

Two notable minor Crusades were the Fifth and Frederick Crusade that happened during the time period of 1208 to 1271. The Fifth Crusade, in 1216 which Pope Innocent III called had a new outlook upon their motives. The goal was not to annihilate the Turks or Muslims forces, but rather to ward off any enemies who posed a threat against the faith. The Crusaders headed into Egypt as they attacked from both land and sea, but surrendered to the Muslims in 1221. Following, the Frederick Crusade led by King Frederick II, was able to attain a civil return of Jerusalem to Christian control through the negotiation with the Muslim leader Al-Kamil to sign a treaty. This lasted for a decade until the Muslim army regained control of the land. The Cross was taken up for roughly fifty years more until this era was laid to rest. The motivations of the Crusades must be examined from several different areas as there are an array of elements that comprise the main focal point on the Holy Wars; the Popes and the Crusaders. Pope Urban II, is a driving force in regard to the motivations behind the Crusades. He heavily supported the church's reform and politically knew that he was strong enough to advocate and speak on behalf of the Crusades due to the "decline in the fortunes of the anti-pope and the western Emperor and the increasing prestige of the reform papacy becoming apparent to all." Urban not only believed that the Holy Wars against the Muslims in the East were just, but as well as supported many other wars happening throughout the region. Looking further into his point of view, they similarly aligned with St. Augustine's, "violence was justified in response to injury" and Urban's response formed as the "War of Liberation." With this mentality, there were two goals in mind. The first was to free the church of Jerusalem and the eastern churches, while

---

the second was to free Jerusalem in its entirety. Jerusalem is an important location during this period in history, since it was the Holy Land and center point of the Christian faith.

Furthermore, God had selected this particular city to redeem His people, Jesus was baptized in the Jordan, died in Golgotha, buried in Holy Sepulchre, and had risen. This location was the 24 history of the Christian faith, which formed a sense of urgency to gain control and protect it at all cost. This mindset in particular was directed at the Muslim forces who were seen as “enemies of the cross,” which further encapsulates a verse in Matthew, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” The Crusades, in Urban’s eyes were 25 seen as a form of merit and led to the path of salvation, since the followers were following God’s authority. These Wars were seen as a way to honor God and what they believed was carrying out His will.

The theme of trusting in God carries on further to the outlook and motivation of the Crusaders themselves. Through the difficult times of war, the Crusaders had put their life, well-being, and faith on the line in order to reach the ultimate goal for “God wills this.” It was 26 believed through their time in battle the victories were due to fulfilling God’s intentions and being a part of His works. The Crusaders saw God as their general, defender, leader, helper, co-traveler, and coworker as well as feeling under divine leadership as they fought in battle. 27 The immense sacrifices that were made by these warriors of faith was with the mindset of fighting for the expansion of Christianity. As the well-known saying goes, with great success, 28 comes with great sacrifice.

The long debated motives behind the Crusades is soon to be unveiled through of driving forces of not only Pope Urban II, but the Crusaders in addition. The Crusades are seen as noble wars that the followers of God fought in order to defend their faith and the Holy Land, although what is not exhumed is the fact that these leaders and Crusaders are breaking a variety of the Lord’s Commandments, such as killing, lying, and coveting their neighbor’s goods. As mentioned before the Crusaders believed that they were upholding God’s intentions since it was “His will” for all of the wars to happen, but in 1096, roughly eight hundred innocent Jews were killed by Crusaders heading to the Holy Land. The massacres that were happening placed the 29 Jewish community in a state of fear; this specific event highlights the gruesome example of the Crusaders breaking God’s law of not killing. During this time, the Churches began hiding the Jews when the Crusaders were passing through to get to the Holy Land. “The road to the Holy land ran through what Jews come to describe as the first Holocaust.” Where most thought the 30 Holocaust was beginning in the twentieth century, it was sadly history repeating itself once more.

Furthermore, the trend of going against God’s Commandments did not stop there. As Urban is preaching about the First Crusade he began labeling it as a pilgrimage. This tactic was ployed in order to recruit, healthwise, more suitable people for the cause, since an epidemic of ergotism was spreading throughout Western Europe. In addition, Urban saw the Crusades as 31 another gateway to salvation for the people. If God’s followers are to take up the cross, then they are to be promised everlasting life with Him. This is seen as a quote on quote marketing scheme to recruit more of a military force for the wars. “And so they are not forced to abandon secular affairs completely by choosing the monastic life or any religious profession, as used to be the custom, but can attain in pursuing their own careers with liberty in the dress to which they are accustomed.” Urban is able to alter the motives so it appeals to the people so it is seen as a way 32 to be with God rather than simply fighting wars to gain land.

---

The Holy Land is a highly sought after region during the time of the Crusades. With the backing of Pope Urban II and the many followers of Christ, the initial idea being spread was to defend the Holy Land. However, that particular location was not in their control and was possessed by the Muslims in the First Crusade. Taking the same approach, one can direct this situation as coveting their neighbor's goods, because they went after it even when pilgrimages were being permitted by the Muslim community. This adds yet another point of disobedience from the people of faith as another Commandment is broken. The Crusades may have been put into a martyrdom light, but truly when unveiled they are regressing in their actions. The true motives are seen as not only gaining dominance in Europe, but as well gaining more land and people of faith.

Examined in a new light, the Crusades are deemed as a cover up story for the greed of the Christians. Thoroughly breaking down them major and looking at each key individual who had a part in the wars has unveiled more than what has been presented at the surface. Pope Urban II presented the Crusades as a noble way of gaining a man's salvation and carrying out the will of God, but truly their actions were going against the Commandments in order to gain the Holy Land. The Crusades may have been to take up the cross, but in the end it only diminished the entirety of that sacred symbol.

## **Bibliography**

1. Billings, Malcolm. ?The Cross & The Crescent A History of the Crusades.? 1st Edition. Two Park Avenue, New York, NY: Sterling Publishing Co., Inc., 1987.
2. Madden, Thomas F. ?the New Concise History of the Crusades Updated Student Edition.? Updated Student Edition. Lanham, Maryland: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.
3. Riley-Smith, Jonathan. ?The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading. ?2nd Edition. United States of America: the University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.
4. Riley-Smith, Jonathan. ?The Oxford Illustrated History of the Crusades.? 2nd Edition. United States: Oxford University Press, 1995.