**The First Crusade**

**(**[**http://history-world.org/crusades.htm**](http://history-world.org/crusades.htm)**)**

**It was against this background that Pope Urban II, in a speech at Clermont in France in November 1095, called for a great Christian expedition to free Jerusalem from the Seljuk Turks, a new Muslim power that had recently begun actively harassing peaceful Christian pilgrims traveling to Jerusalem. The pope was spurred by his position as the spiritual head of Western Europe, by the temporary absence of strong rulers in Germany (the Holy Roman Empire) or France who could either oppose or take over the effort, and by a call for help from the Byzantine emperor, Alexius I. These various factors were genuine causes, and at the same time, useful justifications for the pope’s call for a Crusade. In any case, Urban’s speech—well reported in several chronicles—appealed to thousands of people of all classes. It was the right message at the right time.**

**The First Crusade was successful in its explicit aim of freeing Jerusalem. It also established a Western Christian military presence in the Near East that lasted for almost 200 years. The Crusaders called this area Outremer, French for "beyond the seas." The First Crusade was the wonder of its day. It attracted no European kings and few major nobles, drawing mainly lesser barons and their followers. They came primarily from the lands of French culture and language, which is why Westerners in Outremer were referred to as Franks.**

**The Crusaders faced many obstacles. They had no obvious or widely accepted leader, no consensus about relations with the churchmen who went with them, no definition of the pope’s role, and no agreement with the Byzantine emperor on whether they were his allies, servants, rivals, or perhaps enemies. These uncertainties divided the Crusaders into factions that did not always get along well with one another.**

**Different leaders followed different routes to Constantinople, where they were all to meet. The contingents of Robert of Flanders and Bohemond of Taranto went by sea via Italy, while the other major groups, those of Godfrey of Bouillon and Raymond of Toulouse, took the land route around the Adriatic Sea. As the Crusaders marched east, they were joined by thousands of men and even women, ranging from petty knights and their families, to peasants seeking freedom from their ties to the manor. A vast miscellany of people with all sorts of motives and contributions joined the march. They followed local lords or well-known nobles or drifted eastward on their own, walking to a port town and then sailing to Constantinople. Few knew what to expect. They knew little about the Byzantine Empire or its religion, Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Few Crusaders understood or had much sympathy for the Eastern Orthodox religion, which did not recognize the pope, used the Greek language rather than Latin, and had very different forms of art and architecture. They knew even less about Islam or Muslim life. For some the First Crusade became an excuse to unleash savage attacks in the name of Christianity on Jewish communities along the Rhine.**

**The leaders met at Constantinople and chose to cross on foot the inhospitable and dangerous landscape of what is now Turkey, rather than going by sea. Somehow, despite this questionable decision, the original forces of perhaps 25,000 to 30,000 still survived in sufficient numbers to overcome the Muslim states and principalities of what are now Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. Like Western Christendom, Islam was disunited. Its rulers failed to anticipate the effectiveness of the enemy. In addition, the Franks, as the attacking force, had at least a temporary advantage. They exploited this, taking the key city of Antioch in June 1098, under the lead of Bohemond of Taranto. Then, despite their divisions and factionalism, they moved on to Jerusalem. The siege of Jerusalem culminated in a bloody and destructive Christian victory in July 1099, in which many of the inhabitants were massacred.**

**With victory came new problems. Many Crusaders saw the taking of Jerusalem as the goal; they were ready to go home. Others, especially minor nobles and younger sons of powerful noble families, saw the next step as the creation of a permanent Christian presence in the Holy Land. They looked to build feudal states like those of the West. They hoped to transplant their military culture and to carve out fortunes on the new frontier. Though the Crusaders were more intolerant than understanding of Eastern life, they recognized its riches. They also saw such states as the way to protect the routes to the Holy Land and its Christian sites. The result was the establishment of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem, first under Godfrey of Bouillon, who took the title of Defender of the Holy Sepulchre, and then under his brother Baldwin, who ruled as king. In addition to the Latin Kingdom, which was centered on Jerusalem, three other Crusader states were founded: the County of Tripoli, in modern Lebanon; the Principality of Antioch, in modern Syria; and the County of Edessa, in modern northern Syria and southern Turkey.**