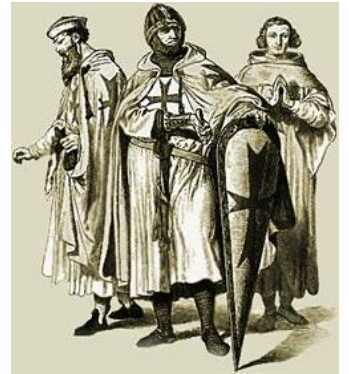


## Why did people risk death on crusade for the Church?

**Your enquiry:** 'Crusaders' were Christian soldiers who made a special promise to fight for Jesus in holy wars called the *Crusades*. Today's task is to find out about motives – a motive is a reason for doing something. You are going to find out why people risked death by becoming crusaders.



### 1. The Religious Importance of the Holy Land

You know that almost everyone in Europe was a Christian in the Middle Ages. Most were Roman Catholics but there were other Christians as well. They lived in the east of Europe. All the Christian countries together were called Christendom.

The most important place on earth for Christians was Jerusalem in Palestine. Jesus died there. Christians wanted to go there on pilgrimage. They wanted to see holy **relics** like the crown of thorns worn by Jesus and the nails from the holy cross. But Palestine was not part of Christendom. Even though Christians called Palestine their **Holy Land** they did not control it. The Holy Land was ruled by Muslims, who followed a religion called Islam. Jerusalem was a holy city for Muslims as well.



### 2. Revenge and Land



In 1071, a different group of Muslims took over Palestine. These were the Turks. They stopped pilgrimages and attacked Christian lands in the east of Europe. The Pope promised to help the Christians in the east. In 1095, he preached a **sermon** at place called Clermont (left). The sermon called on all Christians to win back the Holy Land from the Muslims (or the 'Saracens' as they called them). This is what Pope Urban II said (P.T.O.):



“Brothers, I speak as a messenger from God. Your fellow Christians in the east desperately need help. The Saracens have attacked them and have pushed deep into Christian land. They are killing great numbers of Christians. They are destroying churches and land. In the name of God, I beg you all to drive out these foul creatures.

Your own land has too many people. There is not much wealth here. Europe is too overcrowded. The soil hardly grows enough to support you. Set out for Jerusalem. Take the Holy Land from the wicked infidel and make it your own. Build new homes and grow crops there to support your Christian families.”

### 3. Love of War

During the two hundred years from 1095 to 1291, thousands of Christians did what the Pope wanted. All sorts of people went on crusades. Monks and nuns and soldiers’ wives all joined in. There was even a Children’s Crusade in 1212. It was led by a 12-year old shepherd boy. But the most famous crusaders were the knights.

Knights trained very hard to be fierce soldiers. They practiced in tournaments and tried to impress the women who watched.

Each crusader had to kneel and make his promise to God, to try to capture Jerusalem from the Saracens. The crusader then had the sign of the cross sewn onto his clothes. The Crusades were like most wars – full of brutal and horrible killing. Prisoners were sometimes sawn in half. Overall, the Crusades fitted the skills and ambitions of the knightly classes - as fighting men they could do what they did best (be brave, be honourable, and impress Medieval women), and still receive a spiritual benefit – they could kill and do service to god, rather than killing being a sin.



“A knight loves to prepare for war in tournaments. He sees his own blood flow and feels his teeth crack when his opponent hits him. He is thrown to the ground and rises twenty times. Then he is ready for war.” *From a twelfth-century English writer*

#### 4. Forgiveness

In Pope Urban's speech, he referred to another crucial benefit that crusaders could take advantage of...

"If you die on the journey or if you are killed in a battle against these Saracens all your sins will be forgiven at once. God Himself has given me the power to tell you this.

Some of you have spent too much time fighting against fellow Christians – soldiers who have been fighting for money must now fight for heavenly riches".

#### 5. Other Reasons

There were nine important crusades between 1095 and 1291. Thousands of knights from all over Europe were killed in the Holy Land. They gave their lives to God – but some had other reasons for going...

- "Many have gone to escape from their own land – there are criminals, thieves, robbers, pirates, dice-men, men who have left their wives..."
- "My dear wife, I now have twice as much silver, gold and other riches as I had when I set off"
- "Between wars, there were times of peace when Christians and Muslims traded and shared ideas. Crusaders gained a lot, including carpets, perfumes, spices and new ideas about maths and medicine."



#### Challenge Box

*Read Source A and stick it in. Then answer these two questions.*

- In what way does Pope Urban II talk about the Muslims in his speech at Clermont?
- Why do you think Pope Urban II is speaking about the Muslims like this?

#### Source A

"the Persians (Muslims), an **accursed** race, a race utterly alienated from God, a generation which has not directed its heart and has not entrusted its spirit to God, **has invaded the lands of those Christians** and has depopulated them by the **sword, pillage and fire**; it has led away a part of the captives into its own country, and a part it has **destroyed by cruel tortures**; it has either entirely destroyed the churches of God or appropriated them for the rites of its own religion. **They destroy the altars**, after having defiled them with their **uncleanness**."

*Pope Urban II, Council of Clermont, 1095*