The Causes and Course of the Crusades

**What were the Crusades?**

The Crusades were holy wars fought between Christians in Europe and Muslims in the Middle East between 1095 and 1291. Although the main goal of the Crusades was to take control of Jerusalem away from the Muslims, there were many reasons why European knights and others were willing to travel and fight a war in a foreign land.

**Why were Europeans willing to fight the Crusades?**

For centuries, Christian pilgrims traveled from Europe to Jerusalem. In the 11th century, however, the Seljuk Turks, who were Muslim, began to interfere with these pilgrimages. In 1071, the Seljuk Turks fought against the Byzantine Empire at the Battle of Manzikert. The Byzantines, who were Christian, lost. The Byzantine emperor asked the Christians in Europe to help protect his empire from the Turks. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for a crusade against the Muslims to regain control of Jerusalem. To all crusaders, he gave this promise:

*All who die by the way, whether by land or by sea, or in battle against the [Muslims], shall have immediate [forgiveness] of sins. -Pope Urban II, 1095*

Besides the promise of forgiveness of sins, there were other reasons Europeans were willing to fight. Read the following list of reasons and decide whether the reason is religious, political, or economic. Then, put a letter next to each reason: R for religious, P for political, and E for economic.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Reason** | Religious, Political or Economic? |
| The desire to take control of Jerusalem away from Muslims. |  |
| The belief that fighting in a crusade would give you forgiveness of sins. |  |
| The chance to travel and make money. |  |
| The desire to defend the Byzantine empire from the Turks. |  |
| The opportunity for younger sons of European nobles to get new land in the Middle East. |  |
| The possibility of opening up new trade routes between Europe and the Middle East. |  |

Take another look at the reasons why Europeans were willing to fight. Which one would have convinced you most to go on a crusade? Why?

**Course of the First Four Crusades**

There were nine Crusades fought by European Christians against Muslims in the Middle East. The following chart summarizes the first four. Read through this and then rate each Crusade based on how successful it was from the European perspective. 1= most successful for Europeans and 4 would be least successful.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Crusade | Years | Summary | Rating (1-4) |
| First | 1095-1099 | At the urging of Pope Urban II in 1095, the First Crusade succeeded in taking Jerusalem and was the most successful from the European point of view. When Jerusalem fell in 1099, crusaders massacred Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. Then the leaders divided up the land into territories, each governed by a European feudal lord. |  |
| Second | 1147-1149 | The Second Crusade started when Europeans lost control of Edessa, territory that they had previously controlled, to the Muslims. Led by King Louis VII of France and King Conrad III of Germany, the Europeans failed to regain any land and the crusade was a failure from a European point of view. |  |
| Third | 1189-1192 | The Third Crusade was a response to Jerusalem’s fall in 1187 to Salah al-Din (Saladin). Three great armies from Europe were led by Richard the Lion-hearted of England, Philip II of France, and the Holy Roman emperor Frederick Barbarossa, Europe’s greatest warrior. However, Frederick accidentally drowned, the other two kings quarreled, and the whole crusade failed from a European point of view. |  |
| Fourth | 1201-1204 | Instead of going to Jerusalem, the Fourth Crusade went to the Byzantine Empire’s capital, Constantinople, for various reasons. The European armies looted (robbed) the city and overthrew the Byzantine emperor. The main outcomes of the Fourth Crusade were to deepen the division between Greek and Latin Christianity and to hasten the Byzantine Empire’s decline. |  |

Based on what you have read, were the first four Crusades a success or failure for the Europeans? Why? (3-4 sentences)