

History

The Crusades - Lesson 6 of 6

The Fourth Crusade

Why did Europeans join the Crusades?

Mr Wallace



The Fourth Crusade

The plan for the Fourth Crusade was based on sailing to the Holy Land, and so the Crusaders had entered into an agreement with the city of Venice. Venice promised to make enough ships for over 30,000 soldiers, which cost a huge amount of money. It required the entire city to stop their usual work for the year and only work on this. However, only 12,000 soldiers then joined the Crusade. This left them with a huge **debt** to the **Venetians**, who demanded that the Crusaders pay what was owed. This left them with a serious problem, as without the ships, they had no way of getting to the Holy Land. At this point, the Crusaders were made an offer. A member of the Byzantine royal family, named Alexius, asked them for help in claiming his throne...



The Byzantine Empire

Alexius had lost this throne to a **rival**. In return, Alexius offered the Crusaders a huge sum of money. He also offered to give them military help when they tried to take back Jerusalem. Finally Alexius offered to give the Pope control over the Eastern Church. This was an offer that suited everyone - the people of Venice would get their money, the Crusaders would get help in the Holy Land and the Pope would increase the power of the Church. They agreed to help Alexius. But to do this they would need to attack Constantinople first and remove the current Byzantine Emperor. Some soldiers, unhappy at the idea of attacking other Christians, left the Crusade and either went home, or made their own way to the Holy Land.



The first attack on Constantinople

The Crusaders sailed to Constantinople and many of the soldiers were stunned by what they saw. They had never seen a city so glorious, or with such strong defences. It was a beautiful and magnificent city unlike anything in Europe. It also seemed like it was well-defended.

However, as the Crusaders attacked, the Byzantine Emperor made several bad decisions. Even though he had a larger army than the crusaders, he kept withdrawing it away from battle. The Byzantine Emperor seemed scared to fight, and the city turned on him. One night, he fled the city, and Alexius was able to take control as the new emperor.



Waiting for payment

The Crusader army camped outside the city. There they waited for Alexius to settle his side of the deal and pay the Crusaders. Then the Crusaders would have enough wealth to pay off the debt to Venice. Alexius found it difficult to get enough money and gradually he had to take more and more money from others. He even melted down precious **relics** that were gold to give the crusaders. But it wasn't enough. The people of Constantinople were unhappy with this army that was taking all of the city's money, and Alexius became very unpopular. A rival, called Mourtzouphlous, rose up against Alexius and arrested him.

Mourtzouphlous then crowned himself as emperor. He refused to pay anything more to the Crusaders and tore up the deal which had been signed.



The second attack on Constantinople

The Crusaders were angry, and determined to remove Mourtzouphlous and take the money they had been promised by Alexius. They attacked the city and a fierce battle began. For days the Crusaders attacked the city and gradually broke through the defences. Mourtzouphlous escaped and the Crusaders entered and **sacked** the city. Thousands were killed. Gold and treasures were stolen and taken back to Europe in order to pay Venice. Innocent civilians, women and children, were horrendously treated. The behaviour of the Crusaders shocked and appalled the Byzantine Empire, as well as Europeans. The rampage lasted for three days, and no one could believe that a Christian army had attacked the biggest Christian city in the world. After this, the Crusade ended, and it never even entered the Holy Land.



Glossary

Debt - Money that is owed

Relic - An object that has special importance to people, e.g. a religious object

Rival - Someone who is an enemy or who has interests that go against yours

Sacked - To attack and plunder (steal) from a city.

Venetians - People from Venice



Questions

1. What city built ships for the Fourth Crusade?
2. Which empire did Alexius want to rule?
3. What did Alexius offer to the Crusaders in return for their help?
4. Why was Alexius overthrown by Mourtzouphlous?
5. What did the Crusaders do to the city of Constantinople?

