Church History

The Crusades

1. Background
   1. For centuries, European Christians had been taking pilgrimages down to the Holy Lands, especially the city of Jerusalem, in search of special spiritual merit. Even though Muslims controlled the region, Christians were allowed to visit their holy sites.
   2. Around 1100, a more radical group of Muslims took control of the area and actively resisted and persecuted any Christians who came into their territory. Christians in Europe were incensed that this “wicked race” would bar them from the very land on which their Savior had walked.
   3. At the same time, the more radical Muslims were sweeping across Asia Minor, conquering parts of the Byzantine Empire. Fearing that the Muslims would take the whole Empire, the Eastern Emperor pleaded for help from Europe.
2. The Christian Holy War
   1. Crusade #1—In 1095, in response to the persecution in Jerusalem and the ominous advance of Muslims in the Byzantine Empire, Pope Urban II called for the Christians of Europe to rise up and “enter upon the road to the Holy Sepulchre; wrest that land from the wicked race, and subject it to yourselves.”
      1. The pope promised anyone who participated the full forgiveness of past sins
      2. The crusaders were told that they were fighting God’s war—they took this as license for instigating the worst kind of violence imaginable: murder, plunder, rape, sawing open dead bodies in search of valuables, and even eating the flesh of their victims on occasion. Listen to one crusader’s account of the taking of Solomon’s Temple: “men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies.”
      3. The crusade was successful in the sense that the Christians captured part of the Holy Land (including Jerusalem) and established a Latin-speaking “Christian” kingdom there.
   2. Crusades #2—#7
      1. Extending from the middle of the 1100s to 1300, these various Crusades were attempts to defend the Christian kingdom in the Holy Lands against Muslims; none of these six crusades gained the support that the first one had, and none were as successful; shortly before 1300, Muslims regained full control of Palestine
      2. The Crusades were a disaster from beginning to end; Christians participated in heinous crimes against Muslims, Jews, and even against other Christians
3. In Summary
   1. The Crusades created a lot of bitterness among Jews and Muslims towards Christians, existing clear up to the present
   2. The Crusades were a culmination of the shift in the church that began in A.D. 312