The Crusades: A Short Summary

Three major religious groups all claimed Jerusalem in the land of Palestine as their holy city.

* To Christians, it was the place where Jesus was crucified and ascended to heaven
* To Muslims, it was the place where Muhammad ascended to heaven
* To Jews, it was the site of the ancient temple built by Solomon

In 600 CE, Arabs entered the city and took control.

The Arabs allowed Christian and Jewish pilgrims to visit Jerusalem. In fact, Jews and Christians could live in Palestine as long as they paid their taxes like everyone else.

**The First Crusade:**

**The Problem:** Around 1095, a new group of Arabs took control of Jerusalem. They closed the city to Jewish and Christian pilgrims.

**The Solution**: The Pope acted. He called for a crusade - a volunteer army whose goal was to retake Jerusalem. Many people volunteered. About 30,000 men left Western Europe to fight in Jerusalem.

* For knights, this was a chance to use their fighting skills, something they enjoyed and did well. They were delighted to have such a worthy battle to fight.
* For peasants, this was a chance to escape from their dreary life in the feudal system. The pope promised that if they died while fighting a holy crusade, they would automatically be welcomed into heaven.
* For others, it was a chance to have an adventure, and perhaps even to get rich.

**Sign of the Crusade - The Red Cross**: Each crusader had a huge red cross, made out of fabric, stitched onto their shirts or armor. It made all crusaders, irrespective of rank or background, appear to be a unified army. It reminded the crusaders that they were fighting a holy cause. The red cross was added to flags and banners

**The Results:** After about two years of harsh traveling, hunger, disease, freezing weather, and quarrels amongst themselves, the crusaders finally arrived in Jerusalem. After a two-month siege of the city, the city fell. The crusaders had won back Jerusalem. Some men stayed. Some headed home. Those who returned brought back new foods and new forms of culture.

**More Crusades:** It was a short victory. Less than 50 years later, Muslims once again conquered Jerusalem. Again the pope called for a crusade to take back the city.

**The Second Crusade** lasted from 1147-1149. It was not successful.

**The Third Crusade** lasted from 1189-1192. It was not successful.

**The Fourth Crusade** lasted from 1202-1204. Instead of attacking Jerusalem, the crusaders attacked Constantinople. They stole statues, money, paintings and jewelry. They burned libraries. They destroyed churches. Their ridiculous excuse was that they needed money to defend Constantinople from the same fate as Jerusalem, as well as to fund the rescue of Jerusalem. The people of Constantinople did not find this excuse acceptable, and they were filled with hatred for the west.