

How far was the fall of Jerusalem inevitable?

Key Questions:

In this chapter you will learn:

- Why the West failed to send support
- How the kingdom was internally weakened before 1187
- How Saladin was able to comprehensively defeat the crusaders and capture Jerusalem

You will also develop the following skills:

- Assessing the language and tone of documents
- Comparing sources and their limitations
- Analysing the impact of the long- and short-term weaknesses within the kingdom
- Making a judgement on the causes of the kingdom's collapse

Introduction

In July 1187, the Muslim leader, Saladin, wiped out the entire crusader army at the Battle of Hattin, in Syria. In a single day, castles were captured; their garrisons and the household troops of the king, as well as the military orders, were killed, captured or imprisoned. The crusader kingdom of Outremer was utterly defenceless. Weeks later, after the fall of numerous ports and castles, the Holy City of Jerusalem surrendered to the Islamic forces, never again to return to crusader control.

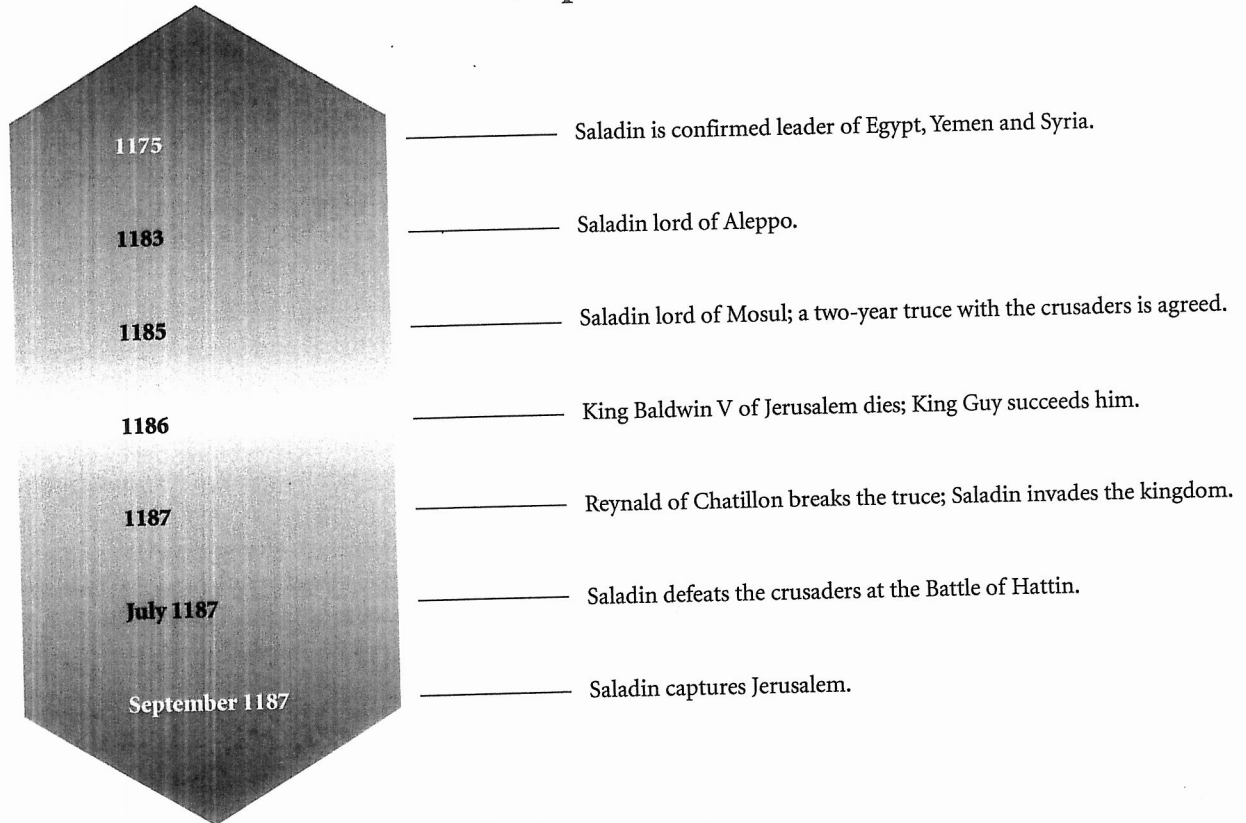
The failure of the Second Crusade in 1148 had indeed dealt a blow to crusader prestige and to western enthusiasm, but the fall of the kingdom was by no means apparent at that stage. It took a series of long-term causes combined with short-term events and situations to precipitate the collapse in the summer of 1187:

- The deaths of Baldwin IV and Baldwin V leaving female heirs in 1185–86.
- The coronation of Guy of Lusignan, an unpopular outsider, in 1186.
- The lack of support from the West between 1148 and 1187.
- The end of the alliance with Byzantium in 1184.
- The rise of Saladin and his domination of the Levant, from 1174 to 1187.
- The treacherous behaviour of some leading nobles, notably Reynald of Chatillon in 1187.

KEY ISSUES

- Why did the West fail to send reinforcements?
- How far was the kingdom internally weakened in the period 1148–87?
- How did the crisis of 1187 occur?
- What happened at the Battle of Hattin?

Chapter timeline



Causation

Causation is a key historical concept. This chapter is concerned with the reasons why Jerusalem and the crusader kingdom were conquered so quickly by Saladin in 1187. In examining any historical event – wars, inventions or revolutions, for example – historians need to assess the long-term causes, which extend over several decades, as well as the short-term ‘triggers’ which add the final spark. From your reading of the introduction and the key questions, you should now be able to draw up a table with ‘long-term’ and ‘short-term’ factors in separate columns.

Why did the West fail to send reinforcements?

The internal divisions of the kingdom were at their very worst in 1186, but it took three external factors to bring down the kingdom. The first of these was the lack of warriors from the West to defend the kingdom. This was not for want of requests from the kingdom over the decades, though political divisions in Europe kept the leaders at home.

The appeal of Gilbert d’Assailly (1166)

Pope Alexander III issued two papal bulls calling for a new crusade, the second following the appeal by the Master of the Hospitallers, Gilbert d’Assailly. Gilbert took the bull to the king of France, Louis VII (the same Louis who had failed on the Second Crusade) and to Henry II of England, who ruled Normandy and the whole of western France. (Henry had married Louis’ first wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, thereby gaining the rich duchy of Aquitaine

in south-west France.) The two kings distrusted one another, but raised taxes for the Holy Land. Several leading nobles answered the call, but kings were needed to mobilise the large armies required in Outremer.

The appeal of Archbishop Frederick of Tyre (1169)

In 1169, the growing power of Nur ad-Din (see pages 95–96) forced the crusaders to send to the West for help. They chose their most senior churchman, Archbishop Frederick of Tyre, to do this. Frederick visited the pope, bringing with him letters for the rulers of western Europe. He stressed the need for the protection of pilgrims and the seriousness of the threat to Outremer now that Egypt and Syria were united. As a result, Pope Alexander issued another bull. Frederick appealed chiefly to Henry II and Louis VII. Eleven letters had already been sent to Louis in the years 1163–65, but Louis was still haunted by his failure on the Second Crusade in 1147–48 and felt threatened by Henry II of England. This time, Frederick offered the French king the keys to Jerusalem itself, echoing the event of 800 when the Emperor Charlemagne had been given the keys. Louis, like Charlemagne, wanted to be seen as the greatest Christian ruler of Europe and defender of the Church; indeed, Charlemagne's banner, the oriflamme, was kept in the church of St Denis in Paris. But Louis could not leave the kingdom when the rivalry with the king of England was so great.

Why didn't Henry II go to the Holy Land?

Henry II had good crusader credentials in his family: his uncle was King **Amalric** and his grandfather was King Fulk. However, in 1169 Henry was embroiled in a dispute with the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket. Peace was made between Henry II and Louis VII and between Henry II and Becket in 1170, and Frederick of Tyre was present at the settlement. But in December 1170, just as peace was within reach and the West could finally be sufficiently united to send a great army to the aid of the crusader kingdom, Becket was murdered by Henry II's knights. The King of England was condemned and there ended the feeling of goodwill and unity. Frederick returned to Outremer alone.

It took a couple of years before Henry II turned his thoughts to the East again. It was the penance imposed on Henry for the murder of Becket which worked in favour of the Holy Land: the Pope ordered Henry to provide 200 knights a year to serve with the Templars. Henry also sent 2000 silver marks to the kingdom and swore to take the cross for three years by 1173. Again, difficulties arose, this time Henry's aid to Outremer was postponed because of a rebellion led by Henry's eldest son, Henry the Younger, in 1174. (The rebellion was supported by his brothers and Henry II's wife, Eleanor, and encouraged by King Louis of France.) Henry II wrote personally to King Amalric, explaining why he could not come, evidence of his sincerity. He quashed the family rebellion, his son died of dysentery and Eleanor was kept under house-arrest until Henry's death in 1189.

BIOGRAPHY

Amalric

King of Jerusalem 1163–74. Amalric was described as strong and intelligent but very fat, apparently having breasts hanging down to his waist. He led five campaigns into Egypt and dominated the nobles. His early death at the age of 38 was a serious blow to the kingdom at precisely the time when Saladin was on the rise.

The appeal of 1181

The debilitating illness of the young King Baldwin IV (he suffered from leprosy) and the growing power of Saladin forced another appeal to Pope Alexander III, who issued another crusade appeal to the kings of France and England. The Pope was aware of Baldwin's leprosy – which he (not very helpfully) saw as God's judgement on the sins of the settlers, but once again, political issues kept the kings at home. Henry II was not the closest male relative to the dying Baldwin and he feared that if he went to the Holy Land, he would have to remain there for years. Philip of France, the young and ambitious son of Louis VII, was busy scheming to regain the territories in France which he saw as rightfully his, allying with Henry's sons against the ageing king of England. Once again, nothing was done to help the Holy Land.

The mission of Patriarch Heraclius (1184)

The combined difficulties of the threat from Saladin (see pages 99–100), the worsening illness of the young King Baldwin and the collapse of relations with Byzantium forced another appeal to the West. This appeal was at the highest level, being led by Patriarch Heraclius of Jerusalem, and the masters of both the Templars and the Hospitallars – an unprecedented mission. They met the Pope, who issued another crusade bull. They then travelled to Paris and again offered the keys to Jerusalem to the young King Philip, but he was not sufficiently well established on the throne to accept. Heraclius turned to Henry II of England, who offered men and money but was advised by his nobles to remain in his own lands, so Heraclius returned to Outremer without a great army from the West, despite his efforts.

How far was the kingdom internally weakened in the period 1174–87?

The problem with the fall of Jerusalem is that the spectacular collapse of the kingdom in 1187 casts a long shadow of hindsight but does not necessarily mean that it was inevitable. The fall of Edessa and the failure of the Second Crusade were a blow for western prestige, but the kingdom remained strong, albeit without Edessa. Baldwin III reigned from 1143 to 1163, but he died childless and another dispute arose over the succession of Amalric. This was quickly resolved and Amalric ruled until 1174 when his son, Baldwin IV, succeeded peacefully and without any internal dispute. It was only in the years 1183–87 that internal divisions became a real issue, at precisely the time when the Arab world under Saladin was at its most united.

The issue of the leper-king

Although this succession was peaceful there were two problems; Baldwin was only thirteen and therefore was not old enough to rule by himself, so a regent had to be appointed. More seriously, Baldwin had contracted leprosy at a young age. Leprosy is a bacterial disease causing inflammation and damage to the nerves and skin. Baldwin's leprosy worsened during his teens, and he lost his sight and his nose as the bacteria multiplied. During an age when a king had to be fit and healthy to lead his armies into battle and to dominate his nobles in the council chamber, Baldwin was going to be in no state to govern the Holy Land. But his inability to lead and to control the kingdom would not necessarily mean the downfall of the kingdom. It took other factors, both internal and external, to do that. In the short term, a smooth succession had to be organised and there was every possibility that continuity and security would be assured.

ACTIVITY

Evaluate the reasons why the West did not send military aid to the crusader kingdom, organising your answer with the most important reasons first.

You could consider the following reasons:

- disputes between the English King Henry II and the French King Louis in the 1170s–80s prevented them uniting against the Muslims
- Henry II was locked in disputes with his sons Henry, Richard, Geoffrey and John and his wife Eleanor from 1174 to 1189
- King Louis had participated in the disastrous Second Crusade and was not a military commander.

The first regency and succession

Miles of Plancy, Amalric's seneschal, controlled the kingdom immediately after the coronation of Baldwin IV in 1174, but he was murdered within months. His successor was Count Raymond III of Tripoli, Baldwin's closest relative, who had spent the years 1164–74 in Muslim captivity. Raymond was an intelligent and widely respected man, and some people saw him as a potential king, though he never made a claim on the throne.

Source

A Ibn Jubayr, a Spanish Muslim pilgrim, writing in 1184, gives an opinion on Raymond of Tripoli:

The most considerable among the accursed Franks is the accursed count [Raymond]... He has authority and position among them. He is qualified to be king and indeed is a candidate for the office.

Whoever married Baldwin IV's sister, Sibylla, would become king. In 1176 Raymond and the nobles had asked William Longsword to marry her. He was the son of the Count of Montferrat (in Italy) and first cousin to both French and German royal families. He accepted and married Sibylla in October 1176, so at least the succession was secured when Baldwin became too disabled to rule directly. That year King Baldwin ended his minority, aged fifteen; Raymond's regency therefore came to an end and he returned to Tripoli.

The death of William Longsword: who would marry Sibylla?

During the following summer William Longsword died, a major blow to the royal family. Sibylla was pregnant and in 1178 she gave birth to a son, Baldwin. Now, not only was the kingdom ruled by a terminally ill leper-king who would gradually become disabled, but his heir was an infant, and unlikely to survive into adulthood given the conditions of the age. The race was on, therefore, to find a suitable husband for Sibylla who could father the next king and stay alive long enough to protect the kingdom. The first choice was Duke Hugh of Burgundy, nephew to the queen of France, but he failed to turn up. When Raymond of Tripoli and Bohemond III of Antioch arrived in Jerusalem to push for Raymond's candidate, Balian of Ibelin, King Baldwin blocked them by choosing Guy of Lusignan, brother to Almaric, the royal constable, but an outsider to the Holy Land.

Faction politics: the 'hawks' and the 'doves'

The rejection of Raymond's candidate and the marriage of Guy and Sibylla in 1180 created a fault line that ran right through the kingdom to the fateful year of 1187. The divided parties have traditionally been called the 'hawks' (who favoured war) and the 'doves' (who favoured peace). The 'hawks' included Guy, an outsider; **Reynald of Chatillon**; King Baldwin's mother, Agnes; and the Master of the Templars, Gerard de Ridefort. The 'doves' included the peace-makers Raymond of Tripoli; the Ibelins; and William of Tyre, chancellor and historian. This division between hawks and doves is not always clear-cut: the so-called 'hawks' favoured peace treaties as much as the so-called 'doves' pushed for war at times. The real division was a family matter; on the one side was King Baldwin's mother's family and on the other side were his cousins on his father's side (Raymond and Bohemond III).

BIOGRAPHY**Reynald of Chatillon (c.1125–87)**

A French nobleman who came to Outremer as an outsider. He married Constance, the widowed heiress of Antioch, in 1153. Reynald was an uncontrollable, murderous barbarian who evoked the hatred and enmity of the Byzantines, crusaders, clergy and Muslims and eventually brought down the kingdom in 1187. In 1156 he ravaged Byzantine Cyprus, killing the Byzantine governor. For this he was forced to pay homage to the Emperor Manuel, damaging the good relations between Outremer and Byzantium. In 1157 he destroyed the possibility of a successful crusader invasion of northern Syria during an illness of Nur ad-Din because he insisted on retaining full powers over any conquests rather than submitting to King Baldwin III. He tortured Aimery, the ageing Patriarch of Antioch, by tying him to the top of the citadel, smearing him in honey and releasing a hive of bees on to him. Between 1160 and 1175 he was held captive by the Muslims and emerged a fanatical enemy of Islam. When he acquired the lordship of Transjordan this gave him a crucial base in the south of the kingdom from where he launched brutal attacks on Muslim caravans (the raid in the Red Sea in 1183 was Reynald's plan). The last of these, in 1187, provoked the successful invasion of the crusader kingdom by Saladin. Reynald was captured at the Battle of Hattin and was personally executed by Saladin, who had sworn to kill him.

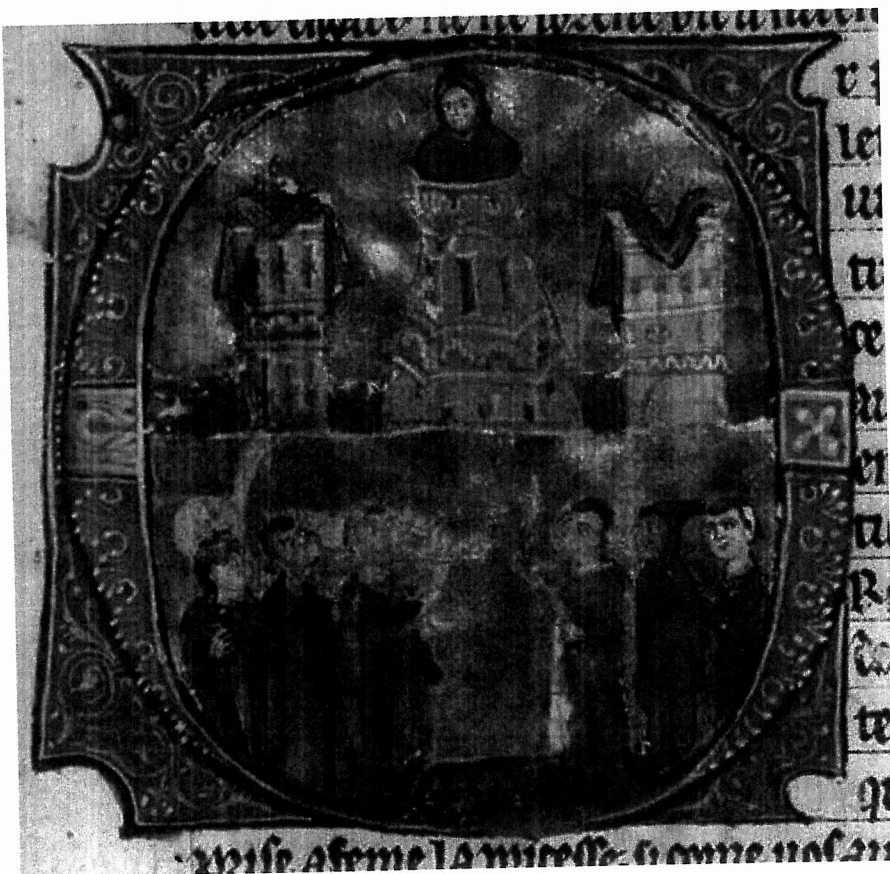


Figure 9.1 Reynald tortures the Patriarch of Antioch (from a thirteenth-century manuscript).