

History of the Crusades.
Episode 49
Tensions Rise and a King Dies.

Hello again. Last week we saw the decline of the Byzantine Empire following the death of Emperor Manuel in the year 1180. This week we're back in the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Now, you might remember from a few episodes ago that in the year 1180 a two-year truce was called between the Latin Christians and Saladin. Yet despite the existence of the truce, tensions rose between the Latin Christians and the Muslims over the next few years. Why did tensions rise? Well, to find the cause, we need to look at the actions of one man, Raynald of Chatillon. Before we take a look at what Raynald has been doing, it's probably worth reminding ourselves of his background, so as to better understand his motives and character.

Raynald came to the Holy Land as part of the French contingent of the Second Crusade. Being a brave and competent soldier, he survived the ill-fated Crusade. After the campaign was finished, he decided to stay in the Middle East to try and make his fortune. He was the youngest son of a minor nobleman back in France, and returning to Europe held no attractions for him.

His fortunes rose indeed, when he caught the eye of Constance, Princess of Antioch. They eventually married, and he used his new power to plunder and raid nearby territory, extending the boundaries of the Principality of Antioch, and committing a number of atrocities on the way, particularly on the island of Cyprus, which suffered greatly following an invasion by Raynald's forces. In the year 1160, Raynald was returning from a raid in Nur ad-Din's territory when he was ambushed and captured. No one seemed to be in a hurry to raise a ransom to secure his release, so he remained in prison in Aleppo for sixteen years, until his release in 1175.

Spending such a long time in prison had not mellowed Raynald, nor reduced his ambition and greed. Princess Constance had died during his years in captivity. His stepson, Prince Bohemond III was ruling Antioch, and Raynald had no means to depose him. Searching for land and fortune, he turned his gaze towards the Kingdom of Jerusalem. He hit the jackpot when he married the wealthy heiress Stephanie of Milly. Upon the marriage, he became Lord of Transjordan, an important strategic region in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, adjacent to Egypt. The important castles of Kerak and Montreal fell under his control, and with his star on the rise, he became actively involved in the politics of the Kingdom, joining an alliance with the leper King's mother Agnes, and his fellow former prisoner-of-war, Joscelin of Courtenay. Favoring a policy of aggression towards his Muslim neighbors, the truce of 1180 wasn't something he supported. He had plans to extend the boundary of Transjordan into Muslim territory and was chafing at the bit, waiting for the truce to end.

The truce enabled the free movement of traders across the Middle East and Raynald was forced to watch as caravan after caravan of rich Muslim traders past unmolested over his land. In the summer of 1181, the temptation became too much. Spying a caravan laden with goods on the road from Damascus to Mecca, he led his troops in an attack on the unarmed convoy, and made off with all its goods, taking the Arab merchants prisoner. Saladin complained to King Baldwin about the violation of the truce, but Baldwin, seriously ill and falling under the influence of his mother Agnes, failed to take any action.

Saladin responded by taking matters into his own hands. An unfortunate group of 1500 Christian pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land were blown off course and forced to land at the port of Damietta. Saladin took them hostage, saying he would release them once Raynald returned the plunder he stole and the merchants he had imprisoned. The request fell on deaf ears and, failing to elicit any response from Raynald, Saladin sold his pilgrim hostages into slavery.

This really didn't bode well for the continuation of the truce, but continue it did. There was the odd skirmish between Muslim and Latin Christian forces, but the truce held until it expired in 1182. Upon its expiry, Raymond of Tripoli led cavalry raids into Muslim territory, while King Baldwin himself led the royal army in an ambitious campaign against Saladin's capital, Damascus. However, the King didn't attack the city itself, and before he could progress his campaign further he became seriously ill with a fever, probably as a result of his ulcerating sores becoming infected. He was taken to Nazareth, and for a few weeks it looked like he might not live.

Meanwhile, Saladin was consolidating his rule across Syria. Nur ad-Din's son, al-Salih, had died in late 1181, and Saladin was kept busy quelling uprisings by al-Salih's supporters, and trying to negotiate a peaceful takeover of his opponents' territories. In mid-1183 Saladin took possession of Aleppo and found himself ruler of Syria and Egypt.

King Baldwin didn't die at Nazareth, but the fever worsened his leprosy. His arms and legs were now seriously disfigured and were starting to decay, and his sight was nearly gone. Realizing that he was in no condition to rule a kingdom, he was persuaded by his mother Agnes and his sister Sibylla to hand over the regency of the Kingdom to Guy of Lusignan, Sibylla's husband. The barons of the Kingdom reluctantly accepted the decision, and King Baldwin retired to Jerusalem to recuperate.

Meanwhile, Raynald of Chatillon was hatching an audacious plan. When the truce between the Muslims and the Christians ended, and with Saladin occupied in Aleppo, he put his plan into motion. His plan was this. He would launch a squadron of ships on the Red Sea and lead a raid down the Muslim pilgrim route to the holy city of Mecca itself. Actually, to say that this plan was audacious was an understatement. It was simply staggering, both in its ambitions and in its insult to the religion of Islam.

There were no trees to speak of in Transjordan, so Raynald imported wood from a forest at Moab, on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea. He took the wood to his stronghold at Castle Kerak and fashioned five ships, building them in kit form. He then transported the sections of the ships to the Red Sea on camels, where the ships were assembled and completed. He launched the five ships and, with himself and his men having no expertise in this area, he hired a band of pirates to captain the vessels and sail them down the Red Sea into the heartland of the Arabian desert.

The small fleet attacked merchant ships that were plying their trade along the Red Sea coastline. They raided and sacked a number of small ports and even ran ashore, so that the Latin Christians could disembark and attack an unarmed caravan traveling overland from Egypt. As the ship sailed further and further down the Red Sea coastline, they came across people who had never even seen a Latin Christian person before. Eventually, the ships attacked the ports servicing the holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina. To add to the outrage, the Latin Christians sank a boat carrying pilgrims to the holy cities.

This of course, caused severe embarrassment to Saladin, the self-proclaimed defender and protector of Islam. He wasn't able to come to the defense of the pilgrims, as he was far to the north, fighting other Muslims. Saladin's brother, the governor of Egypt, however, was closer and was able to take action. By this time, Raynald of Chatillon had retreated back to Kerak, leaving his ships to continue their rampaging journey. The Egyptian governor sent a fleet of ships to pursue the Latin Christians. His fleet attacked Raynald's ships, destroying them and capturing the men on board. Keen to make an example of them, batches of prisoners were sent to Cairo, Alexandria, and Mecca, to be ceremonially and publicly executed. The prisoners who were taken to Mecca were quite possibly the first Christians to have set foot in Mecca since the founding of Islam in the 600s.

Now of course, Raynald's actions were going to have one pretty obvious consequence. Saladin was going to stop attacking his fellow Muslims, and was going to turn his sights on the Crusader states. And that's exactly what he did. On the 17th of September 1183, Saladin left Damascus at the head of a massive army. He had one aim, and one aim only: to attack the Kingdom of Jerusalem and to teach the Latin Christians, and Raynald of Chatillon in particular, a lesson they would never forget. When news of the army's approach reached him, the Regent of the Kingdom, Guy of Lusignan, set about mustering the Latin Christian forces.

Now, before we continue any further, we should pause for a moment and consider Guy's suitability for the task that has been set before him. As we mentioned in Episode 47, Guy came into his marriage to Sibylla with two main assets: he was good looking, and was descended from a water fairy. While his assets were few, his shortcomings were many. He was untried, both as a soldier and a commander. He had no political or military experience. He wasn't particularly intelligent, and was indecisive and weak-minded, tending to agree with whomever he had last spoken. Put simply, of all the people in the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Guy of Lusignan was pretty much the last person you would choose to command the Kingdom's army. Yet here he was. Due to the meddlings of the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction, Sibylla's ill-considered marriage meant that the fate of the Kingdom rested in very shaky hands.

Guy stood at the head of the largest Latin Christian force ever assembled in the Holy Land. It consisted of 1,300 knights and 15,000 infantry, and included Raymond of Tripoli, the Grand Master of the Hospitallers, Raynald of Chatillon, and the Ibelin brothers. As impressive as this force was, the one commanded by Saladin was much larger.

Saladin's army crossed the River Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee and entered the town of Beisan, causing its inhabitants to flee. The Latin Christian army assembled at the town of Sepphora, near Nazareth, and marched southwards to meet the Muslim forces. The advance guard was attacked by the Muslims, but the Ibelin brothers came to the rescue. Save for this and a couple of other minor skirmishes, there was no pitched battle. The Latin Christians set up camp opposite to the Muslim forces, and nothing much happened.

Guy was in a bit of a bind at this stage. Having no military experience, and probably realizing he had yet to earn the respect of anyone, from the rank-and-file soldiers through to their commanders, he was racked by indecision. What he really needed to do was to take command and order an audacious attack against Saladin's forces. If he could pull off a victory in this manner, his position as a military commander would be more secure, and

he would be able to earn the respect he needed to command. But he didn't do this. He didn't really know what to do.

For five days the armies sat and looked at each other. People started to get hungry. People started to get restless. Occasionally, Saladin's men would taunt the Latin Christians and try to goad them into attack, but Guy didn't give any orders. On the one side, Raynald of Chatillon and most of the soldiers were urging him to attack. On the other side, Raymond of Tripoli and the Ibelin brothers were pointing out the foolishness of confronting the much larger Muslim army. Guy just couldn't make a decision. After two weeks of trying and failing to entice the Franks into an attack, Saladin gave up waiting. He lifted camp and moved back over the Jordan River.

Now, on paper, this wasn't a bad result. The army of the Kingdom of Jerusalem had faced off against Saladin's much larger Muslim force, and the Muslims had retreated. But most people didn't see it that way. They concentrated on the fact that Guy, faced with an invading army, had settled on the unpopular tactic of in-action. Most likely, his failure to challenge the invading army wasn't due to any well thought out plan at all, but was more the result of dithering and his inability to make a decision. In short, Guy's first attempt at military command did nothing to quiet in the unease which many felt at having this man at the helm.

Upon returning to Jerusalem, Guy quarreled with King Baldwin. After hearing reports of Guy's military misadventure, the leper King decided that Guy wasn't the type of person who should be ruling Jerusalem after all. He retracted Guy's Regency, and on the 23rd of March 1183 he proclaimed Sibylla's six year old son Baldwin as his successor. Despite being so ill that he could not move without assistance, nor sign his own name, King Baldwin resumed personal control of his Kingdom. He tried, and failed, to convince his sister to have her marriage to Guy annulled. Guy, for his part, turned his back on Jerusalem and retreated to his lands in Ascalon and Jaffa in a sulk. King Baldwin seized Jaffa from his brother-in-law, but Guy managed to hold out against him in Ascalon. Guy's supporters, the Patriarch Heraclius and the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital, spoke up on his behalf, which angered King Baldwin so much that he banished the lot of them from the court. Clearly, King Baldwin had reached, and perhaps exceeded, his Guy-of-Lusignan toleration point.

Meanwhile, in the fiefdom of Transjordan preparations were underway for the marriage of King Baldwin's step-sister Princess Isabella, who at around eleven years of age was getting married to Raynald of Chatillon's step-son Humphrey of Toron, aged around seventeen. Now young Humphrey is pretty much the polar opposite of his stepfather. Quiet, scholarly and good looking in a slightly feminine way, Humphrey was kind and considerate to his child bride. The wedding was being celebrated at Raynald's stronghold in Transjordan, the enormous and very impressive castle of Kerak.

Remember the episode on Crac de Chevaliers a few weeks ago? Well, Castle Kerak is of a similar size to the similarly named Castle Crac, but it's not so well preserved today. I'll post a photo of the remains of Kerak on the website. But back in 1183, the castle was as impressive as any castle you would find in the Holy Land. The wedding was a major event in the Holy Land, and guests were filing in from across the Crusader states. Having tried and failed to induce the Latin Christians to attack his forces in Galilee, Saladin looked around for an alternative target. His gaze settled on, you guessed it, Castle Kerak.

Now, having a massive invading army attack your wedding venue isn't probably the best way to start married life, but there was nothing much Humphrey could do about it. Saladin wanted to punish Raynald of Chatillon for his naval exploits on the Red Sea, and what better way to do that than to attack his castle home in the middle of his step-son's wedding? While the castle was overflowing with wedding guests, entertainers, dancers, musicians, jugglers, cooks, servants, and attendants, Saladin joined up with forces from Egypt and besieged the castle and the town below. He set up his siege engines and started pummeling the castle with rocks and projectiles.

This didn't seem to faze the wedding guests at all. Stocked up with food and wine, they continued feasting, singing and dancing while the missiles rained down upon the thick castle walls. In a fit of goodwill, the mother of the bridegroom, Stephanie of Milly, ordered some of the leftover wedding food be taken out to Saladin and his men. In appreciation over the gesture, Saladin asked where the newlyweds were spending their wedding night. A particular tower was pointed out to him and he ordered his men to leave the tower alone and to concentrate their fire elsewhere. Ah, those were the days, the days of chivalry in warfare.

In the end, the siege didn't last very long. Kerak was one of the more formidable Crusader castles, and Saladin wasn't having any success at all. The thick walls seemed impervious to his missiles, and the deep dry-moat was preventing him from approaching its outer walls. A message was dispatched from the castle to Jerusalem requesting assistance, and the Kingdom's army was quick to respond. Command of the army was given to Raymond of Tripoli, and the seriously ill King Baldwin accompanied the forces in a litter. As the army approached, Saladin lifted the siege and withdrew with his men to Damascus. King Baldwin was carried into Kerak to the cheers of the wedding guests, who were now free to return home. Saladin attacked Kerak again the following year, but once again the fortifications were too strong and he withdrew his forces when the armies of Jerusalem came to the castle's rescue.

Now, things were starting to get serious for King Baldwin around the issue of the succession to the crown. His health had failed to such an extent that he knew he didn't have long to live. On paper, Guy of Lusignan was the obvious candidate, but he was still holed up in Ascalon, refusing to admit any officers of the crown into the city, sulking and generally making a nuisance of himself. Sibylla had made it clear where her allegiances lay by joining Guy at Ascalon. One of the major players in the Agnes / Raynald of Chatillon / Joscelin of Courtenay faction, Agnes herself died around this time aged around 50 years, but this didn't seem to affect the confidence nor the ambitions of the remaining faction members.

In a desperate move, King Baldwin sent the Patriarch Heraclius and the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital to Europe, to try and convince one of the Western leaders to come to Jerusalem and assume the Regency of the Kingdom. It didn't work. So in early 1185, before an assembly of the noblemen of the Kingdom, King Baldwin announced his will. On his death his young nephew Baldwin, Sibylla's child from her first marriage, would succeed to the throne. In an attempt to appease both factions, Raymond of Tripoli would assume the Regency until young Baldwin came of age, while Joscelin of Courtenay would be the boy's guardian. Unfortunately, young Baldwin was a child of delicate health, so King Baldwin's will also had to provide for young Baldwin's early death. The will stated that if young Baldwin died before he reached the age of ten, Raymond of Tripoli should remain

Regent while the Kings of Europe arbitrated the claims to the throne of Sibylla and Isabella.

A few weeks later, in March 1185, King Baldwin died. He was 24 years of age and had ruled for a turbulent eleven years. An eight year old boy of fragile health, King Baldwin V was now ruler of Jerusalem. Join me next week as we discuss the very short reign of King Baldwin V, and its aftermath.

Now, just before we finish up this week, there's a movie I should mention. It's called "The Kingdom of Heaven", and it's Hollywood's take on the events in Jerusalem around the time of this episode. The movie commences in the year 1184 and follows the exploits of a knight from the Ibelin family in the Holy Land. Now, unfortunately, it's not historically accurate, and was widely criticized by historians upon its release in 2005. But for all its shortcomings, I think it's worth a watch, if only for the beautiful reconstruction of Crusader Jerusalem and Castle Kerak. So if you want to see how King Baldwin IV, Sibylla, Guy, Raynald of Chatillon, and Saladin translate to the big screen, track down a copy of "The Kingdom of Heaven". It also contains some impressive battle scenes, and will give you an idea of what the massed Christian forces would have looked like. So if you're scratching around for a movie to watch, grab some popcorn and give "The Kingdom of Heaven" a whirl, keeping in mind of course its lack of historical accuracy. Until next week, bye for now.

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