

History of the Crusades.  
Episode 51  
The Horns of Hattin.

Hello again. The end of last week's episode brought the Kingdom of Jerusalem to the brink of war. A peace treaty which had been in force between the Kingdom and Saladin, had been broken by the actions of Raynald of Chatillon in attacking a wealthy Muslim caravan, and by the actions, or in-actions, of King Guy, who failed to enforce an order requiring Raynald to make reparations for the goods he stole and the merchants he imprisoned.

All in all, things weren't looking all that good for the kingdom. King Guy and Queen Sibylla didn't have the confidence of their subjects, and everyone waited anxiously as Saladin began mustering his forces. Raymond of Tripoli, at this point, was in a rather awkward situation. Not wanting to support the accession to the throne of Queen Sibylla or King Guy, he had set himself up on his wife's lands in Galilee, with his headquarters in the town of Tiberias. He had formed a pocket of resistance opposing King Guy's rule, in the heart of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

To prevent King Guy from invading Galilee, Raymond had formed an alliance with Saladin. As a consequence, Raymond's garrison was boosted with Muslim soldiers, and Saladin's men were free to traverse his land. This was less awkward when there was a peace treaty in force between the Latin Christians and Saladin, but now that the treaty had been broken and war with Saladin looked likely, to say that Raymond Tripoli was in an awkward situation is an understatement. Here he was, one of the most able and respected figures in the Kingdom, surrounding himself with Muslim soldiers and being strongly allied with Saladin.

And things were about to get a whole lot more awkward. In early 1187 Saladin started to muster his forces. He wrote to leaders across his vast territories, calling them to arms and asking them to prepare for a holy war against the Latin Christians. Realizing that it was essential for the defense of the Kingdom to get Raymond of Tripoli back on board, Balian of Ibelin travelled to Jerusalem to urge King Guy to reconcile with Raymond. King Guy was easily persuaded when someone spoke firmly to him, and Balian and must have spoken firmly indeed. As a result of their conversation, King Guy allowed Balian to travel to Tiberias, with the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital and a small contingent of knights, to see whether a peaceful settlement could be reached between the Kingdom and Raymond.

Coincidentally, at the same time, Saladin requested Raymond allow a reconnaissance party of some 7,000 Muslim horsemen to pass through Galilee on their way to Nazareth. Despite some misgivings, Raymond was obliged to give his permission. He told Saladin that the horsemen could pass unimpeded through his lands so long as they entered after daybreak and returned prior to nightfall. The Muslims promised not to attack or harm any town or village in Galilee, and Raymond sent a message out to the people of Galilee, telling them to keep their animals and themselves inside while the thousands of Muslim cavalymen passed by.

The horsemen duly passed through Galilee without incident, but as they were watering their horses at the Springs of Cresson in the hills near Nazareth, they were spotted by the delegation sent by King Guy, who were passing by Nazareth on their way to Tiberias.

Balian, at this stage, was not with the delegation but was back at his castle at Nablus. The delegation had stayed the night at Nablus under Balian's protection. Balian had some business to attend to, so he told the Grand Masters and their knights to ride on ahead, telling them he would meet up with them the next day at the castle of La Feve. So with a large degree of amazement and shock, the Grand Masters of the Temple and the Hospital stumbled across 7,000 Muslims deep in Christian territory.

Now, the Grand Masters' traveling party included around 90 Templar and Hospitaller knights, some 40 secular knights, and 300 mounted horsemen. Despite their small numbers, the Grand Master of the Temple, for reasons only known to himself, decided it would be a great idea to attack the 7,000 Muslim horseman. While it was true that the Muslims were resting and watering their horses, and that consequently the Latin Christians would have the element of surprise, the other leaders quite sensibly tried to talk the Grand Master out of the idea, but the Grand Master, Gerard of Ridefort, could not be swayed. He taunted the Grand Master of the Hospitallers and the Marshal of the Templars as cowards, and the insults must have hit home. Against all common sense, the small group gathered themselves together and charged down towards the thousands of resting Muslims.

What occurred next is called the Battle of Cresson, but it was less a battle, and more a slaughter by the Muslims of their outnumbered and ill-equipped Latin Christian attackers. In the end, only three knights survived the experience. Ironically, one of the survivors was Gerard, the Grand Master of the Temple. He limped back, wounded, to Nazareth. Balian joined Gerard at Nazareth and tried to convince him to continue his journey to Tiberias. Gerard declined, saying that his wounds were too severe. So, accompanied by the Archbishop of Tyre, Balian travelled on to Galilee to meet with Raymond.

Raymond, of course, felt terrible about the whole event. With Saladin building a massive army, the last thing the Kingdom of Jerusalem needed was to lose a bunch of its best fighters. Wracked with guilt, Balian and the Archbishop were able to convince Raymond to annul his treaty with Saladin. He accompanied Balian back to Jerusalem and, with a heavy heart, swore his allegiance to King Guy.

And it was just as well that the Latin Christian forces were finally united, as Muslim fighters from across the vast territory controlled by Saladin were responding to his call for jihad. Egyptians, Bedouins, Arabs, and Kurds were all streaming to Saladin's side, and as a result, the army which was gathering, was enormous. Saladin told the Caliph that his army was so large that the widest plain was too narrow for it, and that when it marched its dust darkened the eye of the sun. It's difficult to put an exact figure on how large Saladin's army actually was, but historians have estimated that it contained between 20,000 and 30,000 fighters, with around 12,000 cavalry.

Saladin spent most of June 1187 readying his forces, preparing battle formations and drilling his large army until he was satisfied that it would obey his instructions. He divided the forces into three contingents. The right flank was placed under the command of his nephew, Taqi Ad-Din; the left was under the command of the Turkish warlord Gokbori of Iran; and Saladin himself took command of the center.

On Friday, the 27th of June 1187, all preparations were complete. The Muslim army crossed the River Jordan, just south of the Sea of Galilee, and invaded the Kingdom of Jerusalem. The war had begun.

Meanwhile, the Latin Christians were busy mustering their own forces. They knew that Saladin had command of an army of unprecedented size, so no expense was spared and no stone was left un-turned in an attempt to gather as many men as humanly possible to counter Saladin's attack. Money which had been kept aside to fund a future Crusade was spent to buy the swords of mercenaries. Bohemond of Antioch sent a contingent from the Principality under the leadership of Baldwin of Ibelin, and knights from across the Kingdom poured in, to a camp at Acre. So many troops, in fact, answered the call that most castles across the Crusader states were left garrisoned with only the barest minimum of the least experienced soldiers.

At Acre, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Heraclius, was called to accompany the expedition bearing the True Cross. The True Cross was a large gold cross encrusted with jewels, that the Christians believed contained a fragment of the wood from the cross upon which Jesus was crucified. It was the most holy item in the Kingdom, and it was to be borne into battle as a talisman and rallying point for the Latin Christian forces. Patriarch Heraclius declined the offer to carry the True Cross into battle, pleading illness, although his opponents were quick to allege that his real reason was that he wished to spend time with his mistress. In the absence of the Patriarch, the Bishop of Acre was appointed to carry the Cross in his place. Assembling beneath the Cross were between 15,000 and 20,000 fighters, of which around 1200 were knights. The Latin Christian army left Acre and marched to Sephoria, the same stronghold near Nazareth where Guy had assembled his army during his first and only military campaign, some four years earlier.

Now, Saladin has two obvious advantages over the Latin Christians at this stage. Firstly his army is larger, and secondly he is taking the initiative. Despite the fact that he is within Latin Christian territory, he knows the land well. He invaded this part of the Kingdom four years ago, and more importantly, due to the pact he has negotiated with Raymond of Tripoli, he has had ample opportunity to make himself and his men familiar with the landscape within Raymond's lands in Galilee and the surrounding areas.

It's summer in the Middle East. It's hot. Men who are marching or fighting in the summer sun, many of whom would be wearing armor, are going to get thirsty. Very thirsty. Saladin realized very quickly that the access of both armies to plentiful supplies of water was going to play a big role in the outcome of the upcoming fight. Sephoria, where the Latin Christians had set up camp, had plenty of water and was easily defended against attack. Saladin knew that he needed to lure the Latin Christians away from Sephoria and out into the arid, waterless landscape, while keeping his own men close to a reliable water source.

So with this in mind, Saladin split his army in two. Half his army camped in hills five miles west of Lake Tiberias, while the other half attacked the town of Tiberias, Raymond's home base. Saladin's forces led a dawn assault on the town on the 2nd of July 1187. It quickly fell, and Raymond's wife, Lady Eschiva, and her entourage, fled to the heavily fortified citadel in the town, where they were able to take refuge.

Saladin intended the attack on Tiberias to be bait, a tasty morsel to be dangled in front of King Guy, to induce him to leave the safety and comfort of Sephoria and cross the plains to come to the aid of the Christian town. With this in mind, he ordered his men to set flammable goods within the town alight so that smoke drifted up over the area, and he ensured that a desperate plea for help penned by Lady Eschiva made its way safely out of the town. Then he sat back to see what would happen.

The trap he was setting was a very good one. There were only two roads from Sephoria to Tiberias. Both roads covered a distance of around 20 miles, which was at the upper limit of a day's march for a large army. The best road was the one to the north. The road was in good condition, and the army was likely to make good progress along it. But, it had one huge disadvantage. There was no access to water along this route. Saladin had taken the opportunity to block up or damage the few wells and springs that usually made this route passable. What about the other road? The other road veered to the south east. It was much rougher, although it did have ready access to water, as it passed by the springs of Cresson. However, it did have one massive disadvantage. It was along this route that Saladin was camped with the other half of his army, the half that wasn't in Tiberias.

Well, if Saladin thought that by invading his hometown and besieging his wife he would change Raymond of Tripoli's stance from one of non-aggression against the Muslims to aggression, he was wrong. As usual, within the Christian camp there were two opposing views about what should happen. It was no surprise that Raynald of Chatillon was urging the army to march onward and attack the Muslims. He was joined by the Grand Master of the Temple, who was no doubt keen to seek revenge after his ill-conceived plan to attack the group of resting Muslim cavalry men at Cresson went so horribly wrong. Most of the rank and file soldiers in the army wanted to see some action as well; they hadn't come all this way just to sit down and do nothing for two weeks before going home again, like they were forced to do the last time King Guy commanded the army.

As usual, Raymond of Tripoli and the Balian brothers were urging caution. The Muslim army was larger than the Christian army and was better placed strategically to fight a battle. Raymond of Tripoli, in particular, knew what any level-headed person should have been able to see, if they were thinking clearly. What he knew was this. It was vital that the Latin Christian Army did not lose any upcoming battle. Well, you might say, surely that's the case with any battle between two foes. Not so. It was particularly important here, and I'll tell you why.

King Guy had put all his eggs into the one basket. Virtually every able-bodied fighting man in the Kingdom of Jerusalem was in his army. As a result, the Kingdom's cities, towns and castles were inadequately garrisoned. If Saladin won, the whole kingdom would be virtually defenseless against his army's advances. Therefore, Raymond of Tripoli argued, it was vital that the Christian army didn't lose. As the Muslim army was larger and better placed, this meant that it was vital that the Christian army didn't leave Sephoria and initiate an attack.

Unfortunately for King Guy, it was up to him to make a decision. Guy didn't like making decisions and preferred to avoid doing so whenever possible. But foremost in his mind would have been the fact that four years ago he had been in this same spot, at the head of the same army, and had been called upon to make the same decision. He hadn't been able to make a decision back then, and things had gone badly for him as a result, very badly. So he had to decide: lead his army in an attack against Saladin's forces and go to the rescue of Tiberias; or decide not to.

Guy held a council of war in his tent. Raymond of Tripoli made a persuasive speech. The plea for help from his wife Eschiva had been delivered to the camp, but Raymond emphasized strongly the folly of leaving Sephoria and going to Tiberias' rescue. The army of Jerusalem would be placed at grave risk. Raymond stated that he would rather lose Tiberias than lose the entire Kingdom.

The war Council adjourned at midnight, with Guy persuaded that the army should remain at Sephoria for the time being. However, after the others had left, Gerard, the Grand Master of the Temple, came back into the tent for a private audience with the King. He spoke strongly to Guy, telling him that Raymond was a traitor and that he couldn't be trusted. He emphasized that it would be shameful to Christendom to abandon a Christian town, which was only twenty miles away, to the infidel. King Guy, having been persuaded by Raymond's speech, was now persuaded by Gerard. In a fateful move, he overturned his previous decision, and sent his herald through the Christian camp to sound the call that the army would march to the rescue of Tiberias at dawn. With no time left to try and get the King to change his mind once again, the noblemen of the Kingdom were forced to obey their monarch's orders.

When dawn broke on the 3rd of July 1187 the Latin Christian army filled their water bottles and left the safety of Sephoria. King Guy's aim seems to have been to reach Tiberias, or at least Lake Tiberias, by the end of the day. With that aim in mind, quick progress was required. Unfortunately for the Latin Christians, it became clear pretty quickly that the day was going to be hot. Really hot. It was mid summer; there was no breeze; and not a cloud in the sky. The next available watering point was at the village of Tur'an, about one third of the way to Tiberias. There was a small spring at Tur'an, and he knew that to succeed in their mission, the army would need to get to Tur'an as quickly as possible, refill their water bottles, water their horses, then proceed through the next waterless part of the march to Tiberias, where water was plentiful.

The army set out, with Raymond of Tripoli leading the vanguard, King Guy commanding the center and Raynald of Chatillon, with the Knights of the Temple and the Hospital, and the Ibelin brothers, bringing up the rear. As the sun rose, their progress slowed. They were slogging their way through a treeless, barren landscape. There was no escape from the sun. It was dusty, and above all it was hot. The progress of the army was slower than everyone had hoped, and they didn't reach Tur'an until midday. Remember, Tur'an was one-third of the way to Tiberias. It was now clear, at the current rate of march, that they would not reach Tiberias by the end of the day. Despite this, the army didn't set up camp at Tur'an. Taking the north road, the best-maintained and faster route, they left the relative safety of the village and pressed onwards.

When his scouts alerted him to the fact that the Latin Christians were on the move, Saladin left a small garrison at Tiberias and gathered all his men together in the camp alongside the southern road. When the scouts later informed him that the Christians had, contrary to expectations, departed from the village of Tur'an, Saladin knew exactly what he needed to do. He sent a small contingent to Tur'an to block any retreat by the Christians.

He knew that the northern road chosen by the Christians was devoid of any sources of water. He led his army northwards towards the village of Hattin. The village lay in the shadow of an extinct volcano, which rose above the plain. The rocky outcrop formed by the volcano was known as the Horns of Hattin. It was here that the northern road began to descend down to the city of Tiberias and the lake, which glistened tantalizingly in the distance. The village of Hattin had adequate water supplies, which would serve Saladin and his men and their horses. They could happily camp here and block the forward passage of the Latin Christians. The army of the Kingdom of Jerusalem was marching straight into a trap.

A few long, hot hours later, the Christians were really starting to suffer. They had consumed the contents of their water bags, and there was nowhere to refill them. They were marching uphill in the dust and the sun. To add to their misery, groups of Saladin's horsemen would, every now and again, gallop up to their lines, let loose a volley of arrows and gallop away again. The wounded, their thirst, and the uphill march, all conspired to slow their progress. It was now absolutely certain that they would not reach Tiberias by nightfall.

The worst part of the day was still to come. In the late afternoon, the vanguard of the army crested the plateau above the village of Hattin. From here, they could see the vast waters of the Sea of Galilee and the city of Tiberias. But they could also see the massive Muslim army gathered on the plain below, blocking their way forward. To get to a water supply and to accomplish their mission and reach Tiberias, they would have to fight their way through. The exhausted and thirsty men could go no further, and King Guy ordered his army to make camp. So, on the arid, waterless, exposed plateau, the Christians settled down for the night. The men spent an uncomfortable night. Ravaged by thirst, and with the joyous sounds of Muslim prayers and songs drifting up from Saladin's camp in the valley below, it would have been difficult to rest.

When dawn broke on the 4th of July, the royal army woke to find itself totally surrounded. Under the cover of darkness, Saladin's men had encircled the Christian camp so completely that a chronicler stated that not even a cat could have slipped through the net. The Muslims set scrub fires on the slopes of the hill on the side of the plateau, and the hot, dry smoke drifted over the Christian camp, increasing the men's thirst and their misery.

Then, shortly after daybreak, the Muslims attacked. Saladin himself led the first charge up the hill. The Christian positions were attacked mercilessly. During the night, Saladin had restocked his archers, supplying them with 400 bundles of arrows. They used those to good effect. Swarms of arrows rained down on the Christian army, causing gaps to open up in the line. The infantry, who had borne the brunt of the long march and were dehydrated and crazed with thirst, broke formation and scattered, with many of them clambering up the rocky outcrop of the Horns to escape the arrows. The Christian cavalry fought desperately, struggling to repel surge after surge of Muslim attackers charging up the hill.

After a while, it became clear that the Christians were all going to perish unless there was some way of breaking out from the plateau and forcing an opening through the Muslim army below, to enable the Kingdom's army to escape. Raymond of Tripoli and Balian of Ibelin were chosen to lead a suicidal charge down the hillside, straight at the Muslim army. It was a desperate move, but it was the Christian army's only chance of survival. The men charged down the hillside into the wall of Muslim fighters, but one of the Muslim commanders recognized Raymond's banner, and the Muslim army parted for their former ally. The charging Christian horses galloped right through Saladin's army and emerged on the other side. The Muslim army then closed up again and fought on as before.

With his men and horses at the point of exhaustion, Raymond knew it would be pointless to turn and fight his way back through the Muslim army. Leaving the rest of the Latin Christians to their fate, he headed back to Tripoli.

Back up on the plateau, things were getting desperate. King Guy decided to move his men further up the hill towards the Horns, where they would make one final stand. They pitched

their tents and prepared for one final battle. What happened next was witnessed by Saladin's son al-Malik al-Afdal, who was seventeen at the time. I'll read his account to you, and I quote. "I was at my father's side during the Battle of Hattin, the first I had ever seen. When the King of the Franj found himself on the hill, he and his men launched a fierce attack that drove our troops back to the place where my father was standing, and I looked at him. He was saddened. He frowned and pulled nervously at his beard. Then he advanced, shouting "Satan must not win!" The Muslims again assaulted the hill. When I saw the Franj retreat under the pressure of our troops, I screamed with joy, "We have won!". But the Franj attacked again with all their might, and once again our troops found themselves grouped around my father. Now he urged them into the attack once more, and they forced the enemy to retreat up the hill. Again I screamed, "We have beaten them", but my father turned to me and said "Silence! We will have crushed them only when that tent on the hill has fallen." Before he had time to finish his sentence, the King's tent collapsed. The Sultan then dismounted, bowed down, and thanked God, weeping for joy." End of quote.

The battle of Hattin was over. The Muslims had won. In a move that sent shivers of foreboding through the Latin Christians, the True Cross was captured by the Muslims. The Christians themselves were all taken prisoner. King Guy, Raynald of Chatillon, and the other noblemen of the Kingdom were all formally received by Saladin in his sumptuous tent. Saladin received the King graciously, bidding him to be seated on a cushion and offering him a goblet filled with rose-water, iced with snow from a distant mountain. King Guy drank eagerly, and handed the goblet to Raynald, who was seated next to him. Saladin quickly intervened. To be offered food or drink by your enemy was a sign, in Muslim custom, of safe passage, and Saladin had no intention whatsoever of ensuring Raynald's safety.

In the end, Raynald of Chatillon was the only nobleman from the Kingdom to be executed. Legend has it that Saladin himself wielded the scimitar that beheaded Raynald. Some 200 captured knights from the Orders of the Hospital and the Temple were also put to death. Theirs was an unhappy ending. Saladin ordered his holy men, the Muslim Sufis, to carry out the grim task. Unfortunately, the Sufis weren't accustomed to wielding weapons, so the deaths of the knights of the Orders were neither quick nor clean. The rest of the rank and file members of the Christian Army were herded off to the slave markets. There were so many of them for sale that the prices plummeted, much to the annoyance of their Muslim sellers.

So there you have it. Saladin has decisively beaten the Christian forces, and the Kingdom has been left largely defenseless. Join me next week for an episode ominously entitled "The Fall of Jerusalem".

Now, just a quick word before I go. Listener Brian Siever thankfully pointed out that I have been wrongly calling the main Greek Orthodox Church in the city of Constantinople the Church of Saint Sophia. In fact, it has nothing to do with St Sophia, and to call it the Church of Saint Sofia is quite wrong. At its construction, way back in the year 537, it was named by the Byzantines, the "Church of Holy Wisdom", or in the original Greek "Aiya Sofia". Thank you to Brian for pointing this out. The church is one of the most beautiful buildings on the planet, and the least I can do is to call it by its correct name, which of course is Aiya Sofia. Thank you also to Harry Demopoulos for his assistance with my pronunciation. So just once again, without a cat meowing in the background, just because

it's nice to finally get the name right and because it's such a lovely name to say, "Aiya Sofia". Until next week, bye for now.

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