The First Crusade

When Pope Urban II rose to his feet to address the multitudes gathered before him at the Council of Clermont in 1095, his appeal was simple: let Western Christendom march to the aid of their brethren in the East. Whether the Crusades are regarded as the most tremendous and romantic of Christian expeditions or the last of the barbarian invasions, they remain one of the most exciting and colorful adventure stories in history. The reasons for joining the Crusade varied widely—remittance from penance, a desire to see the Holy Places, greed for the power and booty that might be captured. But the prize at the end of it all, be it spiritual or temporal, was the Holy City of Jerusalem. The journey’s spectacular culmination was the long siege of Jerusalem, at the end of which the Crusaders, by a brilliant tactical maneuver, broke down its defenses and poured into the city, which erupted in a bloody massacre. Steven Runciman’s History of the Crusades is justly acclaimed as the most complete and fascinating account of the historic journey to save the Holy Land from the infidel. This abridgment makes accessible to a wider readership one of the most compelling historical narratives.

“This is one of history’s most extraordinary episodes made extraordinarily real. Written by an expert blessed with lucidity and style . . . a story that has everything.” – The Church Times

“It reads magnificently. As an example of sustained and intelligent narrative it could hardly be bettered. Sir Steven’s great achievement was to make a complicated subject appear simple and then to write it up beautifully. . . . No one is likely to surpass Sir Steven’s powers of synthesis or the masterly way he writes.” – History Today

Sir Steven Runciman (1903–2000) was the pre-eminent historian of the Crusades and the Byzantine Empire. His acclaimed History of the Crusades was first published from 1951 to 1954.