

Fulk of Chartres: The Capture of Jerusalem, 1099

The final act of the First Crusade was Christian attack on Jerusalem, which was captured on July 15, 1099. Fulk of Chartres, the author of this account, participated in the storming of the city and in the bloody massacre which followed.

Chapter 27: The Siege of the City of Jerusalem

On the seventh of June the Franks besieged Jerusalem. The city is located in a mountainous region, which is lacking in rivers, woods, and springs, except the Fountain of Siloam, where there is plenty of water, but it empties forth only at certain intervals. This fountain empties into the valley, at the foot of Mount Zion, and flows into the course of the brook of Kedron, which, during the winter, flows through the valley of Jehosaphat. There are many cisterns, which furnish abundant water within the city. When filled by the winter rains and well cared for, they offer both men and beasts an unfailing supply at all times. Moreover, the city is laid out most beautifully, and cannot be criticized. for too great length or as being disproportionately narrow. On the west is the tower of David, which is flanked on both sides by the broad wall of the city. The lower half of the wall is solid masonry, of square stones and mortar, sealed with molten lead. So strong is this wall that, if fifteen or twenty men should be well supplied with provisions, they would never be taken by any army. . . .

When the Franks saw how difficult it would be to take the city, the leaders ordered scaling ladders to be made, hoping that by a brave assault it might be possible to surmount the walls by means 'of ladders and thus take the city, God helping. So the ladders were made, and on the day following the seventh, in the early morning, the leaders ordered the attack, and, with the trumpets sounding, a splendid assault was made on the city from all sides. The attack lasted till the sixth hour, but it was discovered that the city could not be entered by the use of ladders, which were few in number, and sadly we ceased the attack.

Then a council was held, and it was ordered that siege machines should be constructed by the artisans, so that by moving them close to the wall we might accomplish our purpose, with the aid of God. This was done.....

. . .When the tower had been put together and had been covered with hides, it was moved nearer to the wall. Then knights, few in number, but brave, at the sound of the trumpet, took their places in the tower and began to shoot stones and arrows. The Saracens defended themselves vigorously, and, with slings, very skilfully hurled back burning firebrands, which had been dipped in oil and fresh fat. Many on both sides, fighting in this manner, often found themselves in the presence of death.

. . . On the following day the work again began at the sound of the trumpet, and to such purpose that the rams, by continual pounding, made a hole through one part of the wall. The Saracens suspended two beams before the opening, supporting them by ropes, so that by piling stones behind them they would make an obstacle to the rams. However, what they did for their own protection became, through the providence of God, the cause of their own destruction. For, when the tower was moved nearer to the wall, the ropes that supported the beams were cut; from these same beams the Franks constructed a bridge, which they cleverly extended from the tower to the wall. About this time one of the towers in the stone wall began to burn, for the men who worked our machines had been hurling firebrands upon it until the wooden beams within it caught fire. The flames and smoke soon became so bad that none of the defenders of this part of the wall were able to remain near this place. At the noon hour on Friday, with trumpets sounding, amid great commotion and shouting "God help us," the Franks entered the city. When the pagans saw one standard planted on the wall, they were completely demoralized, and all their former boldness vanished, and they turned to flee through the narrow streets of the city. Those who were already in rapid flight began to flee more rapidly.

Count Raymond and his men, who were attacking the wall on the other side, did not yet know of all this, until they saw the Saracens leap from the wall in front of them. Forthwith, they joyfully rushed into the city to pursue and kill the nefarious enemies, as their comrades were already doing. Some Saracens, Arabs, and Ethiopians took refuge in the tower of David, others fled to the temples of the Lord and of Solomon. A great fight took place in the court and porch of the temples, where they were unable to escape from our gladiators. Many fled to the roof of the temple of Solomon, and were shot with arrows, so that they fell to the ground dead. In this temple almost ten thousand were killed. Indeed, if you had been there you would have seen our feet colored to our ankles with the blood of the slain. But what more shall I relate? None of them were left alive; neither women nor children were spared.

Chapter 28: The Spoils Taken By the Christians

This may seem strange to you. Our squires and poorer footmen discovered a trick of the Saracens, for they learned that they could find byzants [*note: a gold coin*] in the stomachs and intestines of the dead Saracens, who had swallowed them. Thus, after several days they burned a great heap of dead bodies, that they might more easily get the precious metal from the ashes. Moreover, Tancred broke into the temple of the Lord and most wrongfully stole much gold and silver, also precious stones, but later, repenting of his action, after everything had been accounted for, be restored all to its former place of sanctity.

The carnage over, the crusaders entered the houses and took whatever they found in them. However, this was all done in such a sensible manner that whoever entered a house first received no injury from any one else, whether he was rich or poor. Even though the house was a palace, whatever he found there was his property. Thus many poor men became rich.

Afterward, all, clergy and laymen, went to the Sepulcher of the Lord and His glorious temple, singing the ninth chant. With fitting humility, they repeated prayers and made their offering at the holy places that they had long desired to visit. . . .

It was the eleven hundredth year of our Lord, if you subtract one, when the people of Gaul took the city. It was the 15th day of July when the Franks in their might captured the city. It was the eleven hundredth year minus one after the birth of our Lord, the 15th day of July in the two hundred and eighty-fifth year after the death of Charles the Great and the twelfth year after the death of William I of England.

Source:

Fulk (or Fulcher) of Chartres, *Gesta Francorum Jerusalem Expugnantium* [The Deeds of the Franks Who Attacked Jerusalem], in Frederick Duncan and August C. Krey, eds., *Parallel Source Problems in Medieval History* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912), pp. 109-115.

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