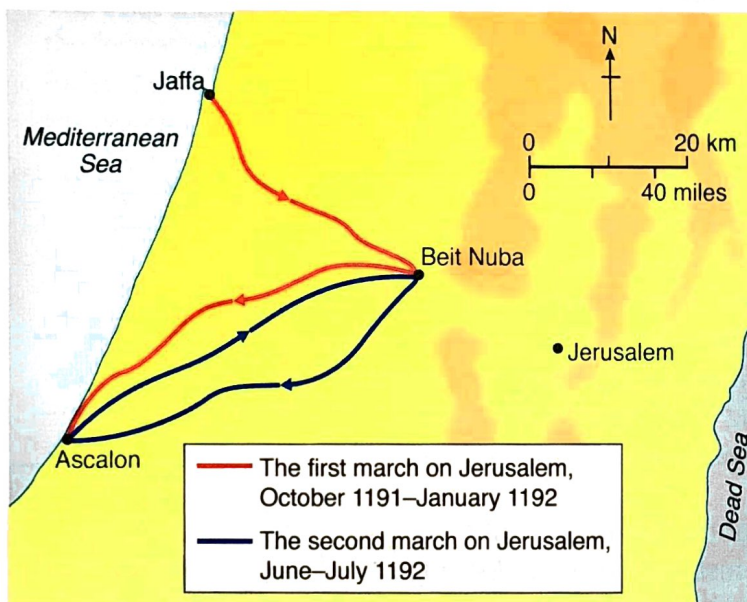


To Jerusalem

The first attempt to take Jerusalem, October 1191–January 1192

The crusaders had only been in Jaffa a few days when worrying news reached them from southern Palestine. In order to prevent the crusaders taking Ascalon, Saladin had made the agonising decision to sacrifice the city. His men had begun to pull down Ascalon's walls. Richard argued for an immediate attack on the port in order to threaten Saladin's communications with Egypt. However, a large number of nobles resisted – they were determined to make a direct assault on Jerusalem. Richard could not persuade them to save Ascalon. The Third Crusade stalled. The crusaders remained in Jaffa and strengthened its fortifications. Some were no doubt distracted by the boatloads of prostitutes who arrived from Acre. Saladin took the opportunity to destroy the networks of crusader castles and fortifications between Jaffa and Jerusalem.



△ The marches on Jerusalem, 1191–92.

On 29 October 1191, the crusaders set out from Jaffa and began the painstaking work of rebuilding the crusader forts along the route to Jerusalem. They were repeatedly attacked by Saladin's troops. However, alongside these military skirmishes, the two sides were also engaged in diplomacy. A willingness to talk and to find areas of agreement, at the same time as engaging in brutal combat, was an important characteristic of the Third Crusade. Richard negotiated with the Sultan's brother, al-Adil and even offered his sister Joan to be one of al-Adil's wives as part of a deal to divide Palestine between the crusaders and the Muslims. Not surprisingly, Joan reacted rather badly to Richard's plan!

As winter set in, heavy rain and cold slowed down the crusaders. It took them nearly two months to reach Beit Nuba, twelve miles from Jerusalem. It was there that Richard, together with knights of the crusader states and the Military Orders, began to doubt the wisdom of laying siege to Jerusalem. They were worried that supply lines to the coast would be cut off by the Muslims and that, even if Jerusalem was taken, the crusaders would not have sufficient manpower to hold on to the Holy City. It was perhaps at this point that the impact of the death of Frederick Barbarossa and the departure of Philip II was felt most keenly. On 13 January, 1192, King Richard gave the order to withdraw. This was a devastating decision that shattered the morale of the Third Crusaders. Richard moved his increasingly depressed and divided army to Ascalon where he kept them busy rebuilding the walls of the city that Saladin had so recently torn down.

The second attempt to take to Jerusalem, June–July 1192

In the spring of 1192, Richard faced increasing pressures from both within and beyond the Holy Land. Divisions in the political leadership of the crusader states hardened when Conrad of Montferrat openly challenged the authority of Guy of Lusignan. The nobility began to turn against King Guy thinking that he would be unable to maintain the Kingdom of Jerusalem when the Crusade ended. In mid-April, Richard abandoned Guy and switched his support to Conrad. Then, in Tyre on 28 April, Conrad was stabbed to death by two assassins. Rumours began to spread that Richard had contracted the murder. The Lionheart's problems deepened when messengers arrived from Europe bringing news that his younger brother, Prince John, had exiled Richard's viceroy, William Longchamp, and had attempted a coup. On 29 May the King began to fear for his Angevin lands when he learned that Philip was plotting with John. Richard fell into a depression, unable to decide what to do next. On 31 May he was overtaken by events when the leading nobles of the Third Crusade decided to march on Jerusalem once more.

A coup is an attempt to seize power.

When Saladin's spies brought him news of the renewed assault he immediately began to reassemble his armies. The Sultan was not in a strong position. Since his great victories at Hattin and Jerusalem in 1187, Saladin's commitment to jihad had deepened, but his capacity to fight the crusaders had weakened. The Sultan's financial resources were severely overstretched and he was struggling to pay for the on-going war. Saladin also faced potential divisions within the army and there were even signs of disloyalty within his own family. He had been fighting for six years and, for much of that time, had been debilitated by recurrent illness. In June 1192, Saladin's priority was to retreat to Jerusalem and to survive the Third Crusade.

This time the crusaders advanced on Jerusalem with much greater speed. By 10 June they had reached Beit Nuba. There they paused to await reinforcements and discuss strategy. Tipped off by local spies, the crusaders made a successful attack on a Muslim caravan taking supplies to Jerusalem. Morale was also boosted by the discovery of yet another piece of the True Cross. Many crusaders must have been aware of 15 July 1099 as the date when Jerusalem had fallen in the First Crusade. Inside the Holy City, Saladin began to despair. He ordered all the wells around Jerusalem to be poisoned and prepared to leave the city for his own safety. A Muslim chronicler later recorded that at Friday prayers on 3 July, Saladin's tears fell to his prayer rug in the Aqsa Mosque. But then, as evening fell, the Sultan received some astonishing news: the crusaders seemed to be in retreat!

There had been a heated debate in the crusader camp about whether a siege of Jerusalem could succeed. Richard argued that the vulnerability of the supply line back to Jaffa, the lack of water and Jerusalem's formidable defences made a successful attack unlikely. He was supported by the majority of the Crusade's leaders. Only the remaining French contingent wanted to continue. On 4 July the Third Crusade collapsed.

■ Make sure you keep adding notes to your timelines and issues documents. You should have plenty of ideas now about Saladin's leadership.

Truce

At the end of July 1192, Saladin decided to take advantage of the crusaders' retreat from Jerusalem by launching a lightning attack on Jaffa. In just four days the Muslim sappers and stone-throwers destroyed sections of Jaffa's walls. The small Christian garrison was forced to take refuge in the citadel of Jaffa. When King Richard heard of Jaffa's plight he rushed south from Acre at the head of a sea-borne counter attack. As they approached Jaffa the crusaders' boats stopped, unsure whether Saladin's forces had taken the citadel. One of the defenders managed to escape and swam to the Christian fleet, explaining that if they acted quickly there was still time to save the town. Richard knew that his men were heavily outnumbered, but he ordered them to attack and was one of the first to wade ashore at the head of his small army. The surprise of his attack gave the crusaders an improbable and dramatic victory. Richard's forces may have been unable to take Jerusalem, but his victory at Jaffa demonstrated his skill and valour as a military leader. It also showed that Saladin was incapable of driving the crusaders out of southern Palestine. Negotiation was now the only option.

Following his victory at Jaffa, Richard's energy was sapped and he fell dangerously ill. He was increasingly worried that his territories in France were in danger from the conspiracy between his brother John and Philip II. The time had come to sign a truce with Saladin. The Treaty of Jaffa was agreed on 2 September. In return for a three-year truce, Palestine was to be partitioned:

- 1 Saladin was to retain control of Jerusalem.
- 2 Ascalon's fortifications were once again to be destroyed.
- 3 The crusaders were allowed to keep the conquests of Acre and Jaffa, and the coastal strip between the two towns.
- 4 Christian pilgrims were allowed access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

In the month after the Treaty of Jaffa was signed, three groups of crusaders made their way to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Sepulchre. Richard was not among them. Maybe he was too ill or perhaps he could not bear to visit the Holy City while it was still held by the Muslims. His refusal to visit Jerusalem meant that he never met Saladin, apart from in the legends and pictures (such as the one we began with) which were created in the years following the Third Crusade.