

# *Warriors of God:*

## *Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in The Third Crusade*

by James Reston, Jr. (excerpts)

“Jerusalem is ours as much as yours,” Saladin replied [to Richard]. “Indeed, it is even more sacred to us than it is to you, for it is the place from which our prophet accomplished his nocturnal journey and the place where our community will gather on the Day of Judgement. Do not imagine that we can renounce it or vacillate on this point. The land was also ours originally, whereas you have only just arrived and have taken it over only because of the weakness of the Muslims living there at the time. God will not allow you to rebuild a single stone as long as the war lasts. As for the Cross, its possession is a good card in our hand. That Jesus died on the cross is a falsehood for us. The Cross cannot be surrendered except in exchange for something of outstanding value to all Islam.” (p. 257-258)

Richard was now prepared to cede the citadel of Jerusalem to the Muslims as well as the Dome of the Rock itself, the Al Aqsa mosque, while the rest of the Holy City was to be divided equally. In the area around Jerusalem the villages were to be apportioned equally to each side. (p. 290)

With the largesse of a victor the Sultan replied, “Allah as his witness, that if he must lose his dominions, he would just as soon lose them to so magnificent a king as Richard. For,” Saladin proclaimed, “Richard was a man of honor, of magnanimity, and of general excellence.” The feeling was mutual. (p. 336-337)

[To his son, el Melek ez-Zaher] “I commend you to God Almighty. He is the source of all good,” the Sultan said. “Do the will of God, for that is the way of peace. Beware of bloodshed. Trust not in that, for spilt blood never sleeps. Seek to gain the hearts of thy subjects, and watch over all their interests, for thou art only appointed by God and by me to look after their good. Endeavor to gain the hearts of thy emirs, thy ministers, and thy nobles. I have become great as I am because I have won the hearts of my people by gentleness and kindness. Never nourish ill feeling against any man, for death spares none. Be prudent in thy dealings with other men, for God will not pardon unless they forgive you. But as to that which is between God and thyself, He will pardon the penitent, for He is gracious.” (p. 348-349)

In the holy city itself Saladin went out of his way to entertain the Christian pilgrims. He encouraged them to kiss the True Cross of their Lord, which had been carried into the battle of Hattin and lost, to visit Mount Zion and Golgotha and the Garden of Gethsemane. It had not been Muslims who had crucified their Savior, after all, and Jesus was one of Islam's prophets. “There are men who have come from afar to visit the holy places,” he wrote, “and our law forbids us to hinder them.” (p. 350)

[Of Richard, he said] “But he is imprudent, not to say foolishly so, in thrusting himself so frequently into danger. He shows too great a recklessness of his own life. For my part, however large the territories are where I am King, I would rather have abundance of wealth, with wisdom and moderation, than display immoderate valor and rashness.”  
(p. 381)