Question: "What were the Christian crusades?"

Answer from GotQuestions.org: The crusades have provided some of the most frequent arguments against the Christian faith. Some Islamic terrorists even claim that their terrorist attacks are revenge for what Christians did in the crusades. So, what were the crusades and why are they viewed as such a big problem for the Christian faith?

First of all, the crusades should not be referred to as the "Christian crusades." Most of the people involved in the crusades were not truly Christians, even though they claimed to be. The name of Christ was abused, misused, and blasphemed by the actions of many of the crusaders. Second, the crusades took place from approximately A.D. 1095 to 1230. Should the unbiblical actions of supposed Christians hundreds of years ago still be held against Christians today?

Third, not that this is an adequate excuse, but Christianity is not the only religion with a violent past. In actuality, the crusades were responses to Muslim invasions on what was once land occupied primarily by Christians. From approximately A.D. 200 to 900, the land of Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey was inhabited primarily by Christians. Once Islam became powerful, Muslims invaded these lands and brutally oppressed, enslaved, deported, and even murdered the Christians living in those lands. In response, the Roman Catholic Church and "Christian" kings/emperors from Europe ordered the crusades to reclaim the land the Muslims had taken. The actions that many so-called Christians took in the crusades were still deplorable. There is no biblical justification for conquering lands, murdering civilians, and destroying cities in the name of Jesus Christ. At the same time, Islam is not a religion that can speak from a position of innocence in these matters.

To summarize briefly, the crusades were attempts in the 11th through 13th centuries A.D. to reclaim land in the Middle East that had been conquered by Muslims. The crusades were brutal and evil. Many people were forced to "convert" to Christianity. If they refused, they were put to death. The idea of conquering a land through war and violence in the name of Christ is completely unbiblical. Many of the actions that took place in the crusades were completely antithetical to everything the Christian faith stands for.

How can we respond when, as a result of the crusades, the Christian faith is attacked by atheists, agnostics, skeptics, and those of other religions? We can respond in the following ways: 1) Do you want to be held accountable for the actions of people who lived 900+ years ago? 2) Do you want to be held accountable for the actions of everyone who claims to represent your faith? Trying to blame all of Christianity for the crusades is analogous to blaming all Muslims for Islamic terrorism.

Recommended Resource: Christianity Through the Centuries by Earle Cairns.