

LEVELED Book • X

# Saladin



Written by Dorothy Kensington

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## Focus Question

What made Saladin a respected leader?

# Words to Know

caravans  
looted  
mosque  
Muslim  
pilgrimage  
raided

sacred  
shrines  
sultan  
truce  
vengeful  
virtuous

Front cover: A French portrait of Saladin from the sixteenth century

Title page: A portrait of Saladin

Page 3: Today, Middle Eastern countries include Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and the countries on the Arabian peninsula.

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## The Middle East in Saladin's Time, 1137–1193



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Jerusalem is one of the world's oldest cities. Today it is the capital of Israel.

## The Middle East

Saladin lived in a part of the world known as the Middle East nearly nine hundred years ago. As a young **Muslim**, he studied his faith and carefully followed its teachings. As an adult, he became one of the most famous Muslim military leaders in history.

The world Saladin was born into was complex. The city of Jerusalem is considered holy by three world religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The city has many buildings and other sites that are **sacred** to the three religions' followers. For centuries, Muslim-ruled Jerusalem was home to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike.

In 1099, decades before Saladin's birth, Western European Christians arrived in the holy city and seized control. They promised safety to the city's residents but instead killed thousands. Saladin would reclaim Jerusalem for Muslims.

## Early Years

Saladin was born in 1137 or 1138 to a Muslim family in Tikrit, Mesopotamia—many miles from Jerusalem. He was the son of a wealthy chief. The family left Tikrit when Saladin was an infant and moved west to Aleppo, in northern Syria. The area, which was under the leadership of **Sultan Zengi**, was part of the Turkish Empire. Saladin's father went to work for Zengi when Saladin was six.

The family moved again, to Baalbek and Damascus, where Saladin attended school at a **mosque** beginning at age seven. He learned about following the Five Pillars of Islam: faith, prayer, fasting, the giving of alms (money or food for poor people), and **pilgrimage**. He also studied science, math, poetry, religion, and Arabic history and culture. He was more interested in becoming a scholar than preparing for a military career.

Saladin's Muslim name is Salah al-Din, which means "he who honors the faith." Saladin is the Western version of his name.



## The Five Pillars of Islam

<b>Faith</b>	Muslims declare their faith: "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger."
<b>Prayer</b>	Muslims pray facing mecca five times a day: dawn, noon, afternoon, evening, and night.
<b>Fasting</b>	During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims cannot eat or drink from dawn to dusk.
<b>Almsgiving</b>	It is the duty of Muslims to give a portion of their income to poor and needy people.
<b>Pilgrimage</b>	If possible, Muslims must make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in their lives.

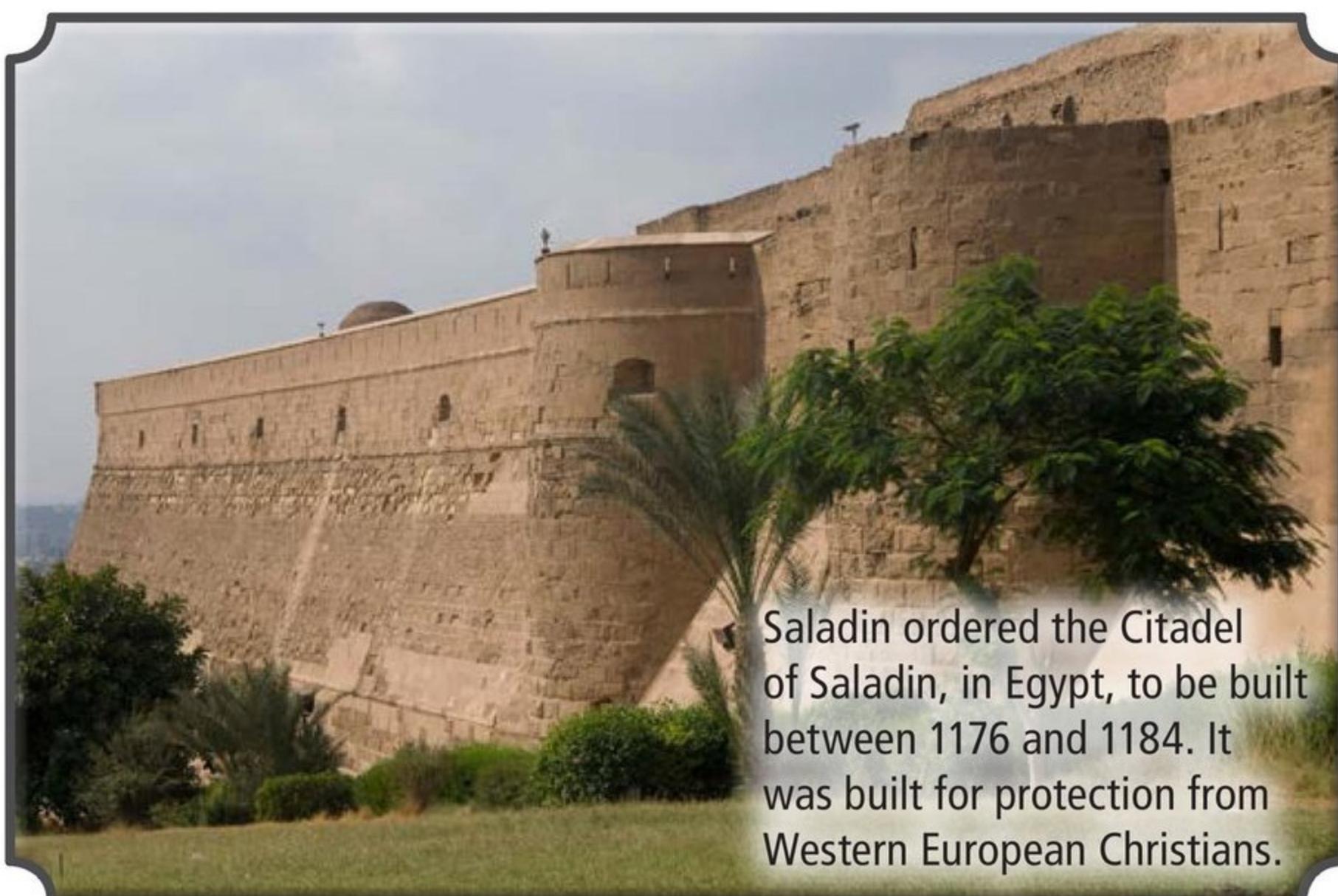
Muslim society placed great importance on leading a spiritual life and having a connection with Allah (God). Muslims were taught to be fair, generous, loving, merciful, noble, and humble.

Saladin's life underwent a great change in 1146. Zengi's second son, Nur al-Din, took control of part of his father's kingdom after Zengi died. Saladin's father became governor of Damascus, and Saladin's uncle Shirkuh became a military general. Saladin joined Nur al-Din's army at age fourteen and became the sultan's chief aide a few years later. The sultan was rich and powerful, but he led a life of honor and simplicity. He ruled with fairness and used his wealth to help his people. Nur al-Din was a model for Saladin's life.

## Rise to Power

Saladin continued to learn and, during his late twenties, he traveled to Egypt with his uncle Shirkuh on several military expeditions. The purpose was to prevent Egypt from falling under the control of Western European Christians, known as Franks. Egypt was in a state of political confusion, and Shirkuh ended up becoming its ruler. After Shirkuh died nine weeks later, Saladin, age thirty-one, became the new ruler in 1169. He also became the commander of Egypt's Syrian troops.

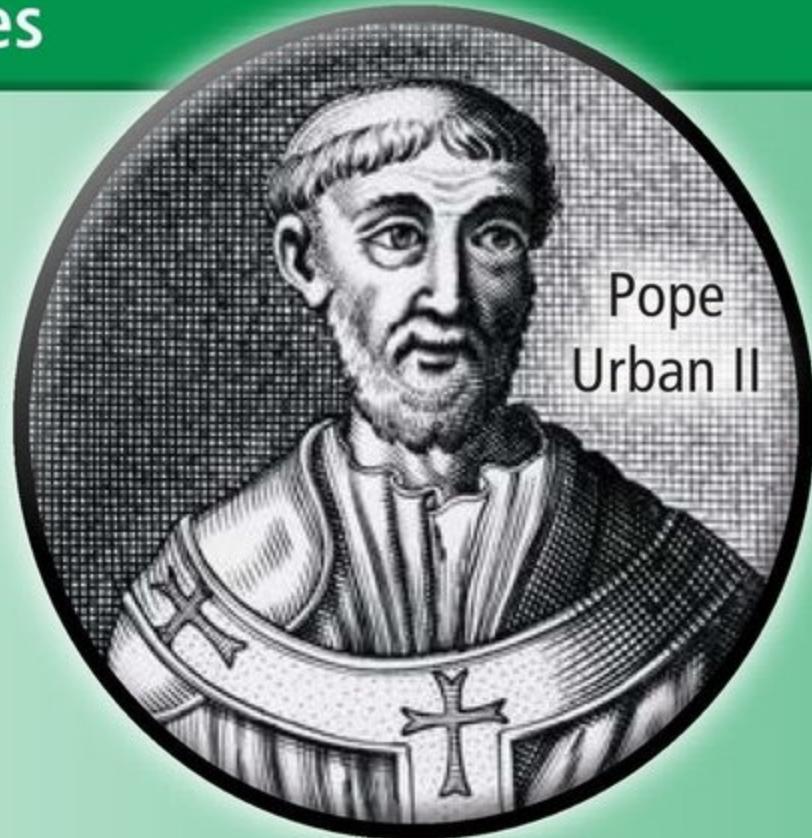
Saladin vowed to free Jerusalem and the surrounding area from the Franks. He improved Egypt's economy and built schools, which attracted scholars from Europe and Asia.



Saladin ordered the Citadel of Saladin, in Egypt, to be built between 1176 and 1184. It was built for protection from Western European Christians.

## The Crusades

Crusades, or wars, were ordered by Popes who called for Western European Christians to fight in the Middle East. Their purpose was to stop Muslim control and reclaim the holy city of Jerusalem and other captured areas. Pope Urban II ordered the First Crusade in 1095.



Saladin could have lived in an enormous palace but preferred a small, simple house, and he gave away most of the palace's riches. As a leader, he gained loyalty because of his strength as well as his gentle, generous nature.

Nur al-Din died just a few years later, in 1174. Saladin, believing he was the best choice to rule, took an army into Syria and fought Nur al-Din's brothers for nine years. During that time, he ordered his soldiers to treat their enemies with respect. Saladin's men never **looted** or burned villages, never pursued a retreating army, and never treated captives without mercy.

Saladin was a skillful political and military leader, and his reputation for being firm, **virtuous**, and generous grew. By 1185, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and northern Mesopotamia—the area between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers—were under Saladin's control.

## Fighting the Franks

In 1187, Saladin launched a war against the Franks, who had conquered Jerusalem eighty-eight years earlier during the First Crusade. His plan was to drive out the invaders, take back the holy city, and encourage the spread of Islam. At the time, the Franks were fighting among themselves over who should rule Jerusalem. Raynald of Châtillon (sha-tee-YOHN), a man who was hostile toward Muslims, gained control of trade routes, and Guy of Lusignan (loo-zee-NYON), became king. Before then, Arab and Frankish traders had passed through each other's lands peacefully. When Raynald took charge, he broke treaties with Saladin, attacked Muslim trade **caravans**, and **raided** coastal towns.

In early July 1187, Saladin's army captured the town of Tiberias and surrounded the castle. In response, King Guy raised a Crusader army of twenty thousand soldiers to take back Tiberias. On the way, Saladin's army forced Guy's troops up against two hills called the Horns of Hattin. Although the Franks fought hard, Saladin's army defeated them badly. King Guy was taken captive, but Saladin later spared his life. However, he killed Raynald, who had destroyed the **truce** between Saladin and the Crusaders. Saladin then took control of the castle at Tiberias.

## Saladin's Battles Against the Franks, 1187–1192



The Franks fled to the fortress at Tyre to build up their forces again. Saladin decided to deal with Tyre later and turned his attention to retaking Jerusalem. His army attacked Jerusalem and took the holy city two weeks later, on October 2, 1187. Saladin had finally accomplished his goal of returning Jerusalem to Muslim control.

The Muslim takeover of Jerusalem was a crushing blow for the Crusaders. In contrast to the Christian takeover of Jerusalem in 1099, Saladin's takeover was not cruel or **vengeful**. No Christian holy places were destroyed, and numerous sources reported that few people were killed. After the takeover, Saladin allowed Christians to continue to visit their **shrines** within the city.

## A Fierce Opponent

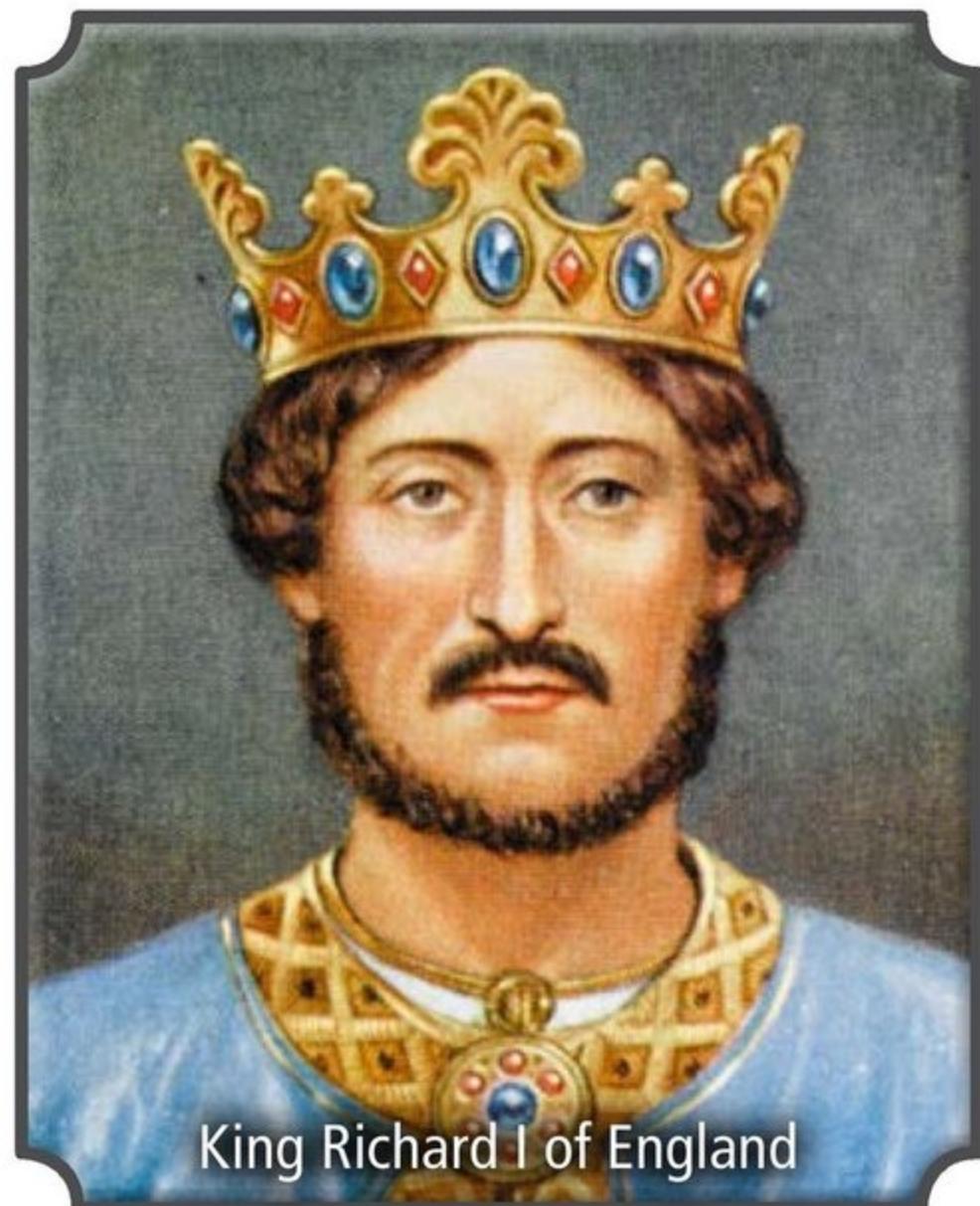
Europe was shocked by the news that the Muslims had taken Jerusalem. European leaders immediately called for a Third Crusade. King Richard I of England (Richard the Lionheart) was one of the European kings who raised armies to take back the holy city. In the end, Richard led the effort.

Saladin tried to capture Tyre, the strongest remaining Frankish fortress, but did not succeed. He freed King Guy at about the same time. Guy and his supporters went to Acre, which was under Muslim control, and attacked. By the time Saladin and his army reached Acre, Crusaders had arrived from Europe, and Saladin couldn't defeat them. A battle lasting 638 days took place with Muslims inside the fortress, surrounded by Christians, surrounded by Saladin's army.

The leaders of the Third Crusade and their armies arrived in the spring of 1191—first Philip Augustus of France, and Richard the Lionheart a few weeks later.



Richard was a brilliant commander who forced the Muslims at Acre to surrender only a month after his arrival. In August 1191, he marched Frankish troops south toward Jaffa while Saladin's archers attacked them nonstop. However, Saladin's army was growing weaker from long years of fighting, and Saladin couldn't stop Richard from capturing coastal cities. Instead, Saladin took his army to Jerusalem to strengthen it against Frankish troops. However, the Franks never attacked. Richard realized he didn't have the army to take and hold the holy city. His decision to turn away signaled the end of the Third Crusade.

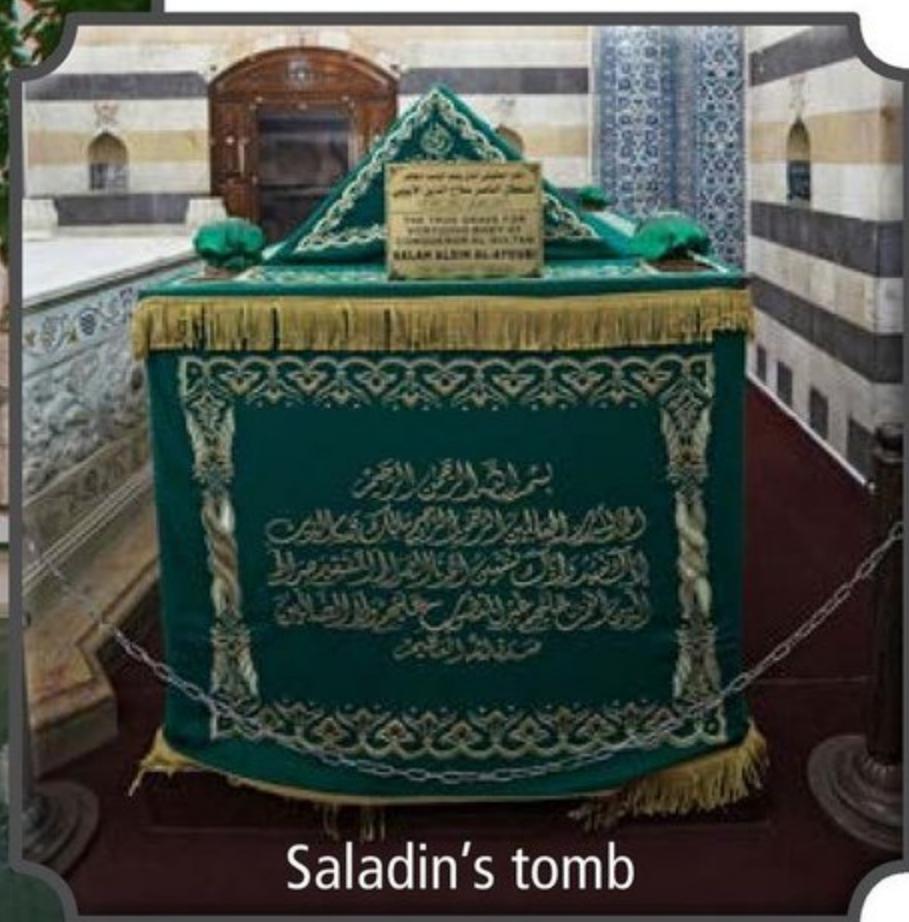


King Richard I of England

On September 2, 1192, Saladin's brother discussed the terms of a truce with Richard. Saladin allowed the Franks to keep the coast between Tyre and Jaffa. The rest of the land, including Jerusalem, would be Muslim land, but Christians would be allowed to visit holy places. Saladin's honorable conduct won him lasting respect and appreciation from the Christian world.

## After the Truce

Saladin went home to Damascus after the truce was signed. He died only six months later, on March 4, 1193, at age fifty-five. Because he never cared much for money or a life of luxury, he gave everything away, so there was no money for a proper burial. He was later buried in a building constructed by his son in Damascus. After Saladin's death, his family continued to rule over Egypt and nearby lands until 1250. At that point, another group gained power. Jerusalem remained mostly under Muslim rule for centuries.



Saladin's tomb

The building that houses Saladin's tomb was built in 1193 and restored in 1898.

A statue of Saladin on horseback stands today in Damascus, South Syria.

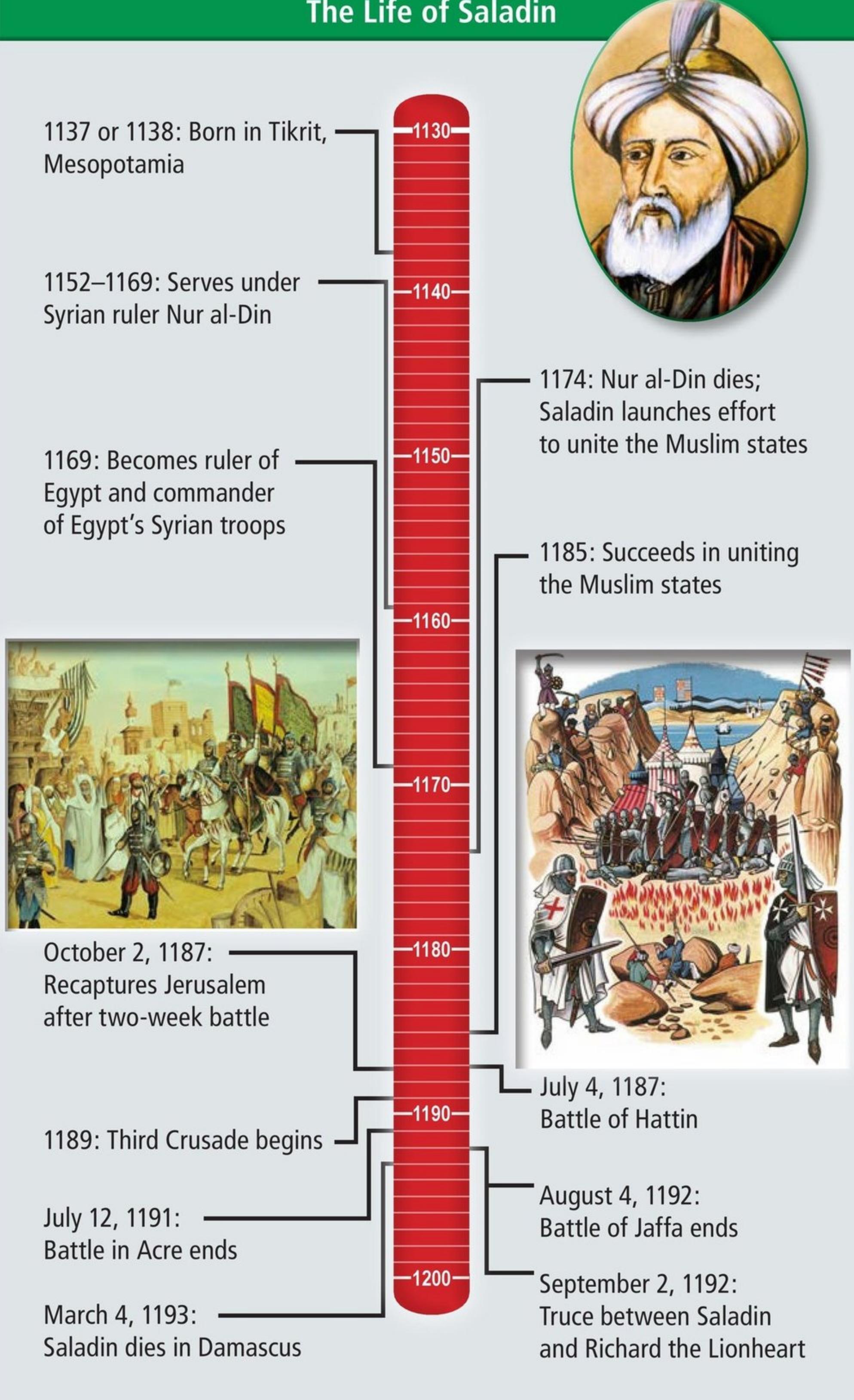


## An Honorable Leader

When Saladin was alive, he was respected for his intelligence as well as his political and military skills. Muslims respected him for uniting them and for driving the Crusaders out of Jerusalem. Even though the Crusaders were his enemies, they too had high respect for Saladin. He was known across two continents as a leader who, while fierce in battle, also showed mercy.

The time in history when Saladin lived—the Middle Ages—was known for great violence. Still, one of its most respected leaders is remembered for just the opposite. Just before Saladin died, he told his oldest son, “I have become as great as I am because I have won men’s hearts by gentleness and kindness.” Saladin set an example of an honorable leader during his lifetime, and he continues to set an example today.

## The Life of Saladin



## Glossary

<b>caravans</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	processions of people, often with vehicles or animals, traveling together (p. 9)
<b>looted</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	stole things, often during a destructive event such as a war or riot (p. 8)
<b>mosque</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a place of worship in the Islamic faith (p. 5)
<b>Muslim</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who follows the religion of Islam (p. 4)
<b>pilgrimage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a journey to a sacred or special place, such as a shrine (p. 5)
<b>raided</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	carried out a surprise attack or invasion with a specific purpose (p. 9)
<b>sacred</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to a god, religion, or spiritual purpose; holy (p. 4)
<b>shrines</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	containers or small spaces where religious objects are kept; places that are considered special or holy tributes to a person or a god (p. 10)
<b>sultan</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a ruler in a Muslim country, similar to a king or emperor (p. 5)
<b>truce</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an agreement not to fight (p. 9)
<b>vengeful</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	desiring or seeking to harm or punish someone in return for an offense or injury (p. 10)
<b>virtuous</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having or showing goodness or clear standards of right and wrong (p. 8)

# Saladin

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book

Word Count: 1,487

## Connections

### Writing

Saladin said, “I have become as great as I am because I have won men’s hearts by gentleness and kindness.” Write an essay explaining how he accomplished this. Use details from the book and outside resources.

### Social Studies

Locate Jerusalem on the map. Discuss with a partner why the three religions of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity all claim rightful ownership of the holy city.

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