Rise and Fall of Papal Power

At the start of the Crusades, the power of the Papacy (the position of the Pope) was already on the rise, but the Crusades took that power to even greater heights. As the one person who had the authority to call for a Crusade, only the Pope had the power to bring together knights and lords from the many lands Western Europe to fight as an army at his instruction. The people of Europe also looked to the Popes as guides and leaders, and gave their money to the church to support the Crusades. In the end, however, the power of the Pope declined along with the failing Crusades, while at the same time the Kings of Europe were becoming more powerful, and even challenging the orders of the Pope (who actually ordered a few small Crusades against those kings). While still a strong force in Western Europe, the Papacy would never again be as strong as it was in the midst of the Crusades.

1. How did the Crusades affect the power of the Pope?

Trade Across the Mediterranean

Crusaders learned early that traveling to the Middle East overland was difficult and dangerous. There was a need for quicker and safer transportation of men and supplies from Western Europe to the Eastern Mediterranean. Northern Italian cities along the coast, such as Venice and Genoa, built large fleets of ships to bring the Crusaders to their destinations, if they could afford it. As Crusading died out, the Venetians and Genoese used their now numerous ships for trade, which increased and expanded. New luxury goods from the Middle East and beyond were being imported by Italian merchants, such as silks and other fabrics, precious stones, perfumes, pearls, ivory, and spices. Those who had lived in the Crusader States had become accustomed to these fine goods, and demand increased across Europe, bringing greater and greater wealth to Northern Italy.

2. Why did trade increase in Western Europe after the Crusades? Give two reasons.
**Feudal System and the Power of Monarchs**

Until the Crusades, the political system dominant in Medieval Europe had been Feudalism, in which land-owning lords provided land to their vassals in exchange for protection. Feudal Europe was decentralized, meaning major central authorities, such as kings or emperors, had little real control over their lands. True power was in the hands of high-ranking lords with titles like Duke, Count, Prince, or Baron. This balance began to shift during the Crusades. Monarchs, or Kings, won the right to collect taxes from their subjects to raise funds for the Crusades, which increased their control over their lands. At the same time, lords in need of money to go on Crusade themselves began demanding cash rather than crops from their peasants, who went to towns to sell what they had grown. No longer serfs bound to the land, these peasants were now only renting land and could leave if they wished, which gave lords less control. As lords left for the Crusades, the kings had less competition, and if the lords died overseas, and many did, their lands were given to the king.

3. Describe two ways the Crusades weakened the Feudal system in Western Europe? Explain why.

**Religious Diversity in Europe**

While the Crusades were supposed to be about the Holy Land, many less well-known actually took place in Europe. Sweden, Denmark, and the Teutonic Knights of Germany fought the “Northern Crusades” against pagans (non-Christians) who lived in Northern Europe around the Baltic Sea, where Christianity had not yet reached. Easily defeated by Christian knights, the Baltic pagans were given forced baptisms, their lands were conquered, and many were killed. In the end, these lands became Christian. In Spain, another Crusade was taking place against the Muslims in the south. Fighting between Islamic Spain and the Northern Christian Kingdoms had been happening for centuries, but when the Pope turned it into a Crusade, knights came from England, France, and beyond to help expel the Muslims. By 1492, the last Muslim territory was conquered, and Spain was conquered for Christianity. One group that suffered throughout the Crusades was the Jews. They lived in many parts of Europe, but during the Crusades many Jewish communities were attacked and massacred, and many kings forced Jews to leave their countries.

4. How was the idea of Crusade used against religious minorities in Europe? Give three examples.
Learning and Culture

The influence of the Crusades upon the intellectual development of Europe can hardly be overestimated. While education, technology, and trade had all declined Western Europe since the fall of Rome, the Muslim Middle East was experiencing a Golden Age of development and prosperity. The Crusades greatly increased Western contact with the East, exposing the Crusaders to diverse cultures, advanced technologies, and the knowledge of the science, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy, including Arabic translations of forgotten Greek and Roman texts, which was brought back to Europe. Thus, the Crusades greatly stimulated the Latin intellect, and helped to awaken in Western Europe that mental activity and motivation for improvement, which resulted finally in the great intellectual outburst known as the Revival of Learning and eventually the period of the Renaissance.

5. How and why did the Crusades improve education in Western Europe?

The Byzantine Empire

It was a request for help from Byzantine Emperor Alexius I that began the first Crusade. Pope Urban had originally called on Christians to defend Constantinople from the attacks of the Seljuk Turks, in addition to saving the Holy Land. However, the Byzantines quickly regretted their request as Crusaders repeatedly robbed Byzantine towns on their way to the Crusades. However, the Fourth Crusade was worse than they could have imagined. Unorganized as usual, the Crusaders arrived at the Italian city of Venice to take ships to the Holy Land, but they did not have enough people to pay for the ships. To pay for the trip, they offered to fight against the Byzantine Emperor at the request of the Emperor’s brother so that he could take the throne instead. But when the new Emperor did not pay them as promised, the Crusaders attacked Constantinople, raping and pillaging as they went, and conquered the Byzantine Empire for themselves, creating what they called the “Latin Empire.” Eventually the Byzantines won their empire back, but they were greatly weakened, setting them up to be conquered two centuries later by the Ottoman Turks.

6. What is so ironic (surprisingly opposite of the expected) about the impact of the Crusades on the Byzantine Empire?