

The Great Commander

SALADIN AL-AYYUBI



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From a Child to a Great Hero

The Tigris River flowed past Tikrit. Behind the city's stone walls, a tiny baby was born.

They named him Yusuf.

He could not yet ride a horse or read a book. With his little hands, he held his mother's finger.

Years later, those hands would hold the reins of a great army and reach out to people in need.

This child would grow up and leave his mark on history through courage, wisdom and generosity.

His name would be heard in distant cities, and his story would be told for centuries.

That child was Saladin.



Young Yusuf's life began with journeys. He travelled with his family to other cities, discovering new streets and meeting new people.

As he grew, books lay before him and learned people surrounded him. He listened to his lessons, studied his faith and deepened his knowledge.

His father served in the city's government. His uncle Shirkuh was an experienced commander. Yusuf grew up learning from them.

He still had much to learn.

One day, he would make important decisions and be responsible for many people. First, he had to prepare himself.

This was how Saladin's long journey began: learning, working and growing, step by step...



In time, young Yusuf grew up.

The roads ahead now stretched far beyond school courtyards. He set off for Egypt with his uncle Shirkuh.

Dust rose beneath the horses' hooves, and the road became a thin line on the horizon. At its end, the land of the Nile awaited them.

Egypt was facing difficult times. Different groups were struggling to rule the country.

Saladin took on important duties there. He faced challenges and gained experience.

When his uncle died, a great responsibility was placed on his shoulders: he became vizier.

Now his decisions would affect thousands of lives.



In time, Saladin became sultan of the Ayyubid state.

Every day brought news, questions and requests for help. Cities needed protection, the country needed governing, and people's needs had to be met.

During his reign, schools, hospitals and bridges were built.

Students entered school gates, patients sought healing in hospitals, and travellers crossed bridges.

Saladin's responsibilities reached even the smallest streets of his cities.

As he strengthened his country, he also touched people's lives.

But another great struggle lay ahead, one that would last for years.

A distant city awaited him: Jerusalem.



Jerusalem was a holy city, home to the first qibla—the direction Muslims originally faced in prayer.

Years before Saladin was born, a Crusader army had captured Jerusalem. A terrible massacre followed, and many people unable to defend themselves were killed.

Massacres also took place elsewhere during the Crusades. Families were forced from their homes, and war brought great suffering.

Saladin wanted to regain Jerusalem. This goal went hand in hand with his responsibility to protect his people from attacks.

But first, he needed to bring scattered forces together.

The road to Jerusalem was long. It called for patience and determination.



Saladin spent years preparing. He held talks and made agreements. He brought together a powerful force in Egypt and Syria.

Not every step was easy. Sometimes he waited; sometimes he tried again.

To regain Jerusalem, he had to face the Crusader army in battle.

In the hot summer of 1187, the armies met on the hills of Hattin.

Saladin led his soldiers. Years of preparation were now being put to the test.

The battle was hard. In the end, Saladin's army won.

The victory at Hattin became a great achievement remembered in history.

Now the road to Jerusalem was open.



At last, the walls of Jerusalem came into view.

High stone walls... Closed gates... Homes and narrow streets beyond them...

Saladin stood before the city he had worked for years to reach.

The siege began. As the days passed, the people inside waited. Mothers, fathers, children... Their lives depended on how the struggle would end.

Balian, who was defending the city, came to meet Saladin.

The two sides discussed the terms of surrender. After the long struggle, they reached an agreement.

The fighting would stop.

Jerusalem's gates would open.



2 October 1187...

Jerusalem's gates opened. Saladin entered the city he had worked for years to reach.

The great commander had achieved his goal.

The massacre that had followed the Crusader army's arrival years earlier was not repeated when he took the city.

Under the agreement, most people leaving had to make a payment called a ransom. Saladin arranged for many poor people to be freed without paying it.

Jerusalem and its people were now under his protection. He would defend the city against new Crusader attacks.

Saladin would be remembered not only for his great victory, but also for the mercy he showed.



Work to restore Jerusalem began.

Craftsmen set to work. Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock were repaired. A new chapter had begun for the city.

But the struggle was not yet over.

New Crusader armies arrived from Europe. King Richard of England also joined the war. Saladin fought again to protect Jerusalem and the lands he ruled.

Long, tiring years passed. Sometimes he advanced; sometimes he withdrew.

Finally, an agreement was reached in 1192. Jerusalem remained under his rule. Christian visitors were also allowed to visit their holy places.

For a time, the noise of war grew quiet.

Now the footsteps of visitors could be heard along the roads.



After his long journeys, Saladin returned to Damascus.

He was back in the city where he had grown up. Now he was a great ruler whose name was known even in distant lands.

Throughout his life, he had helped many people and shared his wealth generously.

In 1193, he became ill and died.

He left behind a great state, but very little of his own money remained.

Those who had known him told stories of their time together. Historians wrote about his life.

Years passed. Children grew up. Cities changed.

But the story of how young Yusuf became a great commander was not forgotten.

Saladin's story travelled across the centuries to reach us.



Now you are reading this story.

Once, Saladin was a child too. He had lessons to learn, challenges to overcome and a long life ahead of him.

He worked hard and grew up to become a great commander and a brave hero. He left a lasting mark on history.

Your own journey might begin with a book you read today. Or with the day you help a friend or stand up against something unfair...

As you learn, keep your promises and show kindness, you too can leave a beautiful mark on the world.

Perhaps one day, new Saladins will rise among us.

People whose courage brings hope, whose knowledge guides others and whose compassion protects them...

Perhaps you will be one of them.

