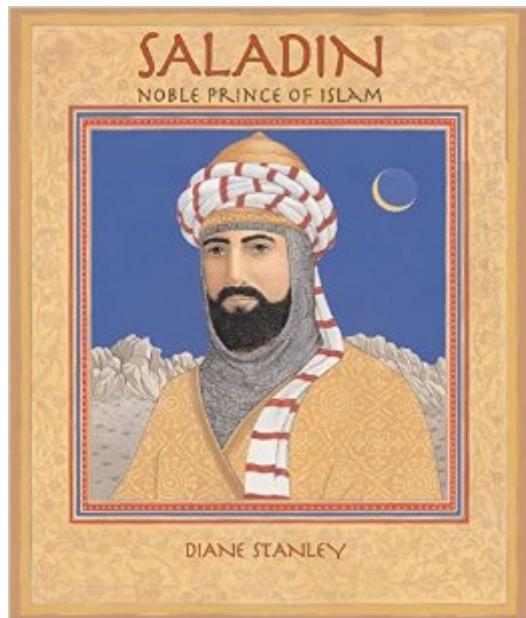


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Saladin: Noble Prince Of Islam



Synopsis

Forty years before the boy was born, a horde of bloodthirsty barbarians thundered out of the west and conquered his native land. They had succeeded because his people, ever at war with one another, had not fought together to defend their cities. In time the boy was destined to become the very leader that was needed, a man with the courage and vision to unite his people and face the most fearsome and brilliant warrior of the age. The time was the twelfth century; the barbarian horde was the armies of the First Crusade; the great warrior was Richard the Lionhearted; and the leader was Saladin. This is more than the other side of a familiar Western story, the Crusades. It is the tale of an extraordinary man, remarkable for his generous and chivalrous ways, a warrior who longed for peace. Courageous in battle and merciful in victory, he would be revered even by his enemies as the "marvel of his time." In her vibrant narrative and magnificently detailed illustrations inspired by the Islamic art of the time, Diane Stanley presents a hero whose compassion, piety, tolerance, and wisdom made him a model for his time -- and for ours.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

Customer Reviews

A beautiful book and well illustrated, sure to be a classic. As I note, the book is certainly one-sided. It seems the author cannot say anything negative at all about Saladin, and cannot say anything good about the Christians. This is not to say that the book is not historically accurate, but the

historical details depicted are very selective, and sometimes misleading. The book begins, e.g., by noting that the Muslims had been in possession of the Holy Land for several hundred years, and that Saladin ruled peacefully and treated Christians fairly. This is true, but it could also be mentioned that (1) the Muslims had taken the land by force from Eastern Christians who had previously lived there peacefully, (2) Christians had held Jerusalem peacefully for several decades before Saladin invaded and took it by force; (3) previous Muslim rulers, before Saladin, were far from fair and peaceful, and often sanctioned the massacre of Christian pilgrims, and (4) so great was the distress of the native Christians that the Emperor of the East, Alexius, wrote to the Pope to request a Crusade in the 11th century to liberate the region from the occupying power of the Muslims. None of this is even alluded to. Also, less peaceful episodes of Saladin's rule, such as his mass execution of Christian prisoners of war at Hattim in 1187, are not mentioned. Less savory aspects of his life, such as his polygamous marriages to multiple (very young) wives, are glossed over as acceptable ('...because Islam allows four marriages'), without noting the rather disturbing aspects of such practices. While the author praises Saladin for not killing prisoners of war taken in Jerusalem, she does not mention that they were sold into slavery instead. This is not to say the book is not without its value, or that I would expect such details in a book like this, but I think the book could have been a little more 'fair', or historically accurate, while retaining a basically positive outlook on Saladin, whom I do not deny is certainly a chivalrous man for his time. But he was, nonetheless, a man of his time, and the author seems determined to make him more than that.

When you look at the British involvement in that farcical escapade known as the Crusades, it seems remarkable that ANYONE living today could side with England. I mean, let's look at it soberly. They come into a country in the Middle East, take over huge swaths of it, claim it as their own, are shocked when the residents of the area don't like being oppressed, then set about hacking their way back in only to fail in the end. Just a scant overview of their actions is enough to make them look vaguely ridiculous. Once you start learning a little more about their actions (or rather, the actions of their leaders) you see just how violent and, not to put too fine a point on it, evil they were. Therefore, it's a bit surprising that a popular kid's book about Saladin hasn't been written before now. At this moment in time, circumstances have given kids a chance to learn more about the followers of Islam and their history. It seems fitting, then, that we should look at one of their greatest heroes and grant him the respect he's due. "Saladin: Noble Prince of Islam" does just that. Saladin was born along the Tigris River well after Jerusalem fell into the hands of the marauding Crusaders from England. As a child, he attended to his studies well and learned the tenants of Islam by heart. All this gave him the

understanding he required to be a good and righteous man amongst his people. As a teen Saladin became the chief aide of the Turkish sultan Nur al-Din, a fair leader who earned the respect of his subjects. From him Saladin found his role model and guide. After Nur al-Din's death, he staked his claim on the man's empire and brought together his warring brothers. This allowed him the army he needed to set out to defeat the Franks and to reclaim Jerusalem once more. To do this he faced Reginald of Chatillon, "perhaps the greatest villain in the history of the Crusade" (which is saying quite a lot), Richard the Lionhearted, and other adversaries. The book recounts a myriad of battles undertaken by both the Crusaders and the Muslims. Both sides had their wins and losses. In the end, however, Saladin was victorious and in 1291 (years after his death), "the Franks were driven out of the Holy Land altogether". So well done there. Though it doesn't look it, this book is an excellent reference for any kid interested in battles and battle strategy. It summarizes the greatest confrontations of both sides and makes them understandable and interesting. There is also no question at any time as to who the heroes are. The Franks (to the Muslims all Crusaders were regarded as "Franks") break treaties, lie, kill for pleasure, and remain the greediest of no-goodniks. Saladin would often spare his captured enemies or give them a chance to pay a price to avoid being sold as slaves. King Richard, on the other hand, was prone to slaughtering three thousand Muslim men when he captured them. A cruel barbarian, he met a violent death, as was his due. Saladin died in his bed, having ended his life to his own liking. Touche. I suspect that there are people out there who can't imagine a man like Saladin being far more generous and compassionate than a man like Richard. To back up her information, therefore, author Diane Stanley has included an excellent Bibliography for further reading. Terms that might not be readily recognizable to readers are included in a Glossary in the back. Accompanying the text itself are beautiful glossy illustrations that perfectly compliment the book's plot and storyline. All this and the book is respectful to the people of the Islam faith. Biographies of historical figures well known in their native lands but little known in American schools are difficult to create. With that in mind, Stanley has done a remarkable job. She even ties in the events of the book to the modern day, commenting that, "Two hundred years of Frankish invasion, senseless slaughter, and religious fanaticism left a tragic legacy. A shadow of hatred and mistrust had fallen over this great land, holy to three faiths. A thousand years later, it is still there". And not likely to leave soon. Let us hope then that beautifully written biographies like "Saladin" dispel the myths that remain about the man, his life, and his religion. This book should be in every school library in America.

This is a fine book for young readers who seek an introduction to a hero revered to this day in the

Arab and Islamic world and highly respected by historians of the Crusades. Diane Stanley shows how compassionate Saladin was with his enemies even after tens of thousands of civilian Muslims were massacred in cold blood in Jerusalem by the Crusaders (who were fighting for the cross as directed by that era's Pope). His rise to power, struggle to unite Muslims of Greater Syria and Egypt, cunning military leadership and passion to liberate Jerusalem are well explained to the young audience. His adversaries (like King Richard) involvement in the Crusades are well covered, while illustrations that accompany the book are of high quality. Overall, a recommended book for those who would like to know about an enlightened Muslim leader and legend.

Once again Diane Stanley has written a splendid, gripping, dramatic history. Once again the illustrations are gorgeous. Once again the book dares to challenge children to grasp complex and deep content. Once again the prose and flow make the book hard to put down. The author is careful and tactful in handling certain rather gruesome and brutal details. She does not bowdlerize, or skip or gloss over; nor does she dwell on the horrors. They are quietly and neatly related as required to understand the story; then she moves on. Also recommended: by the same author, biographies of Cleopatra and Queen Elizabeth

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