IDAHO KNIGHTLY NEWS

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Editor's Note

If you would like to submit an article to the Idaho Knightly News, please email it to me as a Microsoft Word document. Keep it between 1 page and 1.5 pages.

Upcoming Events:

Thanksgiving Day.....Nov 26

Christmas Day.....Dec 25

Baldwin IV: The Leper King

By Barry E. Newell

Commonly referred to as "The Leper King," King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem ruled the Crusader Kingdom from 1174 until he died in 1185. He was born in 1161 to Amalric, Count of Jaffa (Joppa), and Agnes of Courtenay. Following the death of his uncle, Baldwin III, his father became King Amalric I of Jerusalem in 1163. Baldwin was educated under the supervision of William of Tyre, a well-known medieval historian whose writings remain an important source for the history of the Knights Templar, who would later become Archbishop of Tyre. During Baldwin's childhood, William noticed something unusual about the young prince. While playing with other boys who pinched one another's arms, Baldwin showed no reaction to pain. William discovered that portions of the boy's right arm and hand had lost sensation. These were early symptoms of what would eventually be recognized as leprosy, a disease that would progressively disable him throughout his life.

Following his father's death on July 11, 1174, Baldwin ascended the throne at 13 and was crowned 4 days later. Raymond III, Count of Tripoli, eventually assumed the regency during Baldwin's minority. The young king inherited a kingdom facing increasing pressure from its Muslim neighbors, particularly Saladin, who was consolidating his control over Egypt and Syria. Baldwin's illness also presented a serious political problem. His prospects for marriage and producing an heir were poor, leaving the future succession of the kingdom uncertain.

The Knights Templar played a significant role in Baldwin's reign. By this period, the Order had developed into an

established military and religious institution, maintaining castles and garrisons throughout the Holy Land. Unlike the ordinary feudal nobility, the Templars possessed their own leadership and considerable independence under papal authority. Their military resources made them valuable allies to the king, particularly when the kingdom faced invasions that required immediate action.

The relationship between Baldwin and the Templars is perhaps best illustrated by the Battle of Montgisard on November 25, 1177. Saladin had invaded the kingdom from Egypt with a substantial army, expecting little resistance from the young and seriously ill king. Baldwin, then 16 years old, assembled a comparatively small force and was joined by ~80 Templar knights under their Grand Master, Odo de Saint-Amand. The Christian forces encountered Saladin's army near Montgisard, where the Muslim troops had become dispersed across the countryside. Baldwin and his commanders took advantage of the situation and launched an attack that resulted in a significant defeat for Saladin. The victory temporarily secured the kingdom and established Baldwin's reputation as a capable military leader despite his illness.

The cooperation between Baldwin and the Templars continued in 1178 when construction began on a fortress at Jacob's Ford, an important crossing of the Jordan River along the route between Damascus and Galilee. The fortress, known as Chastellet, was intended to strengthen the kingdom's eastern defenses and was entrusted to the Templars. Its location was particularly valuable because it controlled a crossing that could be used by invading armies. The project also demonstrated the considerable influence of the Order upon the kingdom's military strategy. Historian Malcolm Barber notes that the Templars had a particular interest in securing this region because they already possessed the nearby fortress of Safad.

The following year proved disastrous. On June 10, 1179, Christian forces suffered a serious defeat at the Battle of Marj Ayyun, during which Grand Master Odo de Saint-Amand was captured by Saladin and subsequently died in captivity. In August, Saladin besieged and captured the unfinished fortress at Jacob's Ford, destroying the fortifications and inflicting heavy casualties upon its defenders.

Baldwin's physical condition continued to deteriorate, eventually leaving him unable to ride or walk without assistance. Nevertheless, he remained involved in the defense and government of Jerusalem. In 1183, despite his declining health, he accompanied an army sent to relieve the besieged fortress of Kerak. That same year, concerned about the succession and dissatisfied with Guy of Lusignan, his sister Sibylla's husband, Baldwin arranged for his young nephew to be crowned co-king as Baldwin V. Baldwin IV died in 1185, having ruled for approximately 11 years.

For us as modern Masonic Templars, Baldwin's reign offers insight into the medieval Order's military service and its relationship with the Kingdom of Jerusalem. Despite political divisions and his worsening illness, Baldwin successfully resisted Saladin throughout much of his reign, aided by the Templars. Jerusalem ultimately fell in 1187, just two years after his death.