

## **Thankful for Freedom's Defenders**

622 A.D. marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar. That year was the 'hijra' or 'emigration' of Muhammad from Mecca to Medina. Due to his successes on the battlefield, at his death ten years later in 632 A.D., most of Western Arabia had become Islamic. Within thirty years Islam spread as far west as Tripoli and a little further east than Kabul.

A hundred years later Islam had spread to include over half of what had been considered Christendom before that. Although it had not reached much further east than Kabul, at that time Islam had spread as far west as the Atlantic Ocean. Then it had turned north and developed significant influence in the Iberian Peninsula, which includes modern day Spain and Portugal. Almost all of this growth was military growth.

To be fair, for the most part Islam tolerated Christians and Jews quietly practicing their religions in the areas they had conquered, as long as they paid the jizya, or poll tax. But those areas had been conquered with force, not persuasion. By the 730's it was clear that the Islamic militants of that age planned to invade and take all of Europe if they were not stopped.

Thankfully, Charles Martel, or Charles the Hammer as he is known in modern English, led troops to stop the Islamic militants in the Battle of Tours in 732 A.D. Had he not, the entire world may have been forcefully converted to Islamic control by now. Certainly all religions, including nearly every flavor of Christianity, have also had awful historical moments when power wed with the state led to oppressive acts. I am thankful that the tendency in the early days of America toward state churches (like the ones in Europe) was overcome by the first amendment.

Had Charles Martel not stopped Islamic expansion, however, the entire world may now be under the kind of oppression seen in Saudi Arabia today. Frustrated in its attempts to conquer Europe, militant Islam eventually began expanding south into Africa and further east. Indonesia is now the largest Muslim country in the world, not one of the Arab countries.

As we approach the fifth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup>, I am thankful for the leadership of President Bush and others who have recognized that if we did not answer strongly we would face worse in the future. I am thankful for those soldiers who have fought to preserve freedom around the world. I am also thankful for the relatively few Muslims who have had the courage to speak out and say that this is not how they want their religion to be advanced. They want to persuade others about their faith with words, not impose their faith on others by force. I fully appreciate the potential death they face by making themselves heard- but they must make themselves heard.

Now I would like to give some biblical reflection on the occasional necessity of Christians supporting military action to stop the world's aggressors. Jesus' call in Matthew 5:39 for an individual who has been struck to turn the other cheek does not mean that it would be

the right thing to do for that same person to passively watch his child, his wife or his neighbor be assaulted. Turning your own cheek is not the same as passively watching injustice done to another.

Of course, Christians are never allowed to embark on a holy war to advance Christianity, or even to reclaim lands that had once been “Christian.” That was the grievous error of the crusades. But Christians are allowed to join their nations in defending the cause of freedom when an aggression is happening. That is why Charles Martel was right to stop Islamic advancement by force in his day. That is why America was right to help stop Hitler in World War II. And why it is right to stop terrorists in our day.

Ecclesiastes 3:8 does tell us that there is a “time for war and a time for peace.” And the Bible does give several examples in its pages of just war. In Genesis chapter 14 Lot was kidnapped. Abraham went to war with 318 trained men and rescued Lot. In Numbers chapters 21 Israel tries to peacefully pass through the land of the Amorites on its way to Canaan. The king of the Amorites took the opportunity to make war on Israel. Israel defended herself, and soundly defeated the Amorites.

The Book of Esther even gives a scenario where a preemptive strike is just. Facing a decree that could not be withdrawn calling for the extermination of the Jewish people, the Jews sought and obtained from the king of Persia the right to strike first and defend their existence. You might want to read that entire story: the book of Esther takes only fifteen minutes to read. And it is very interesting that it was a Persian king that acknowledged the Jews right to defend themselves; especially considering that Persia corresponds with modern Iran, whose current leader wants to annihilate Jewish people.

As the fifth anniversary of September 11<sup>th</sup> draws near, and we daily hear of new lives lost in far away places, we are reminded in many ways that freedom is not free. I for one am very grateful to those who gave their lives to keep us free from tyranny of all kinds. And I say thank you again to President Bush and troops around the world doing a necessary but difficult task.

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