

Self Defense

A Christian Viewpoint

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Many Christians are not aware that the Bible has quite a lot to say about owning and bearing arms in self-defense. Take for example the book of Esther. Esther's central theme is the Providence of God, and especially His preservation of the Jews, by allowing them to defend themselves, in the face of the hatred of a high official in the Persian empire in the fifth century BC.

LESSONS FROM ESTHER

In Esther 9:1-10, the Jews established the "Feast of Purim," which celebrates the armed self-defense of the Jewish people. This feast is still observed by the Jews today but many Christians know little about the Feast of Purim. Here is the text...

"Est 9:1 On the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar, the edict commanded by the king (Xerxes who reigned over Persia 486-465 BC) was to be carried out. On this day the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, but now the tables were turned and the Jews got the upper hand over those who hated them.

Est 9:2 The Jews assembled in their cities in all the provinces of King Xerxes to attack those seeking their destruction. No one could stand against them, because the people of all the other nationalities were afraid of them...

Est 9:28 These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants."

The Feast of Purim, also called the Feast of Lots, is celebrated in either the latter part of February, or early March.

Whenever we read the Bible, we should be looking for modern day applications. How does the story of the Book of Esther, and the authorizing of armed self-defense in the 5th century BC, apply to Jews and Christians today? Clearly, armed self-defense is approved by God.

"The tables were now turned in their favor; and though their enemies made their long meditated attack, the Jews were not only at liberty to act on the defensive, but through the powerful influence enlisted on their side at court together with the blessing of God, they were everywhere victorious."

Jamieson Faussett and Brown on verse 2

In order for God's people to accomplish the will of God, it may sometimes be necessary for them to bear arms and literally fight. King David wrote in Psalm 18:34-39...

"He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms...I have pursued mine enemies, and overtaken them: neither did I turn again till they were consumed. I have wounded them that they were not able to rise: they are fallen under my feet. For thou hast girded me with strength unto the battle..."

LESSONS FROM NEHEMIAH

When Nehemiah was rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem, it was necessary for him and the other men to go armed for self-defense.

"And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me."

Nehemiah 4:16-18

"We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch] The strongest confidence in the protection and favour of God does not preclude the use of all or any of the means of self-preservation and defense which his providence has put in our power."

Adam Clarke on Nehemiah 9:4

Many of the heros of the Bible were men at arms: Joshua, Gideon, Samson, etc.

LESSONS FROM GOD'S LAW

The first five books of the Bible are sometimes called the Torah, which means "The Law." In these books we find the Ten Commandments, and many other laws God gave to His people to order their lives. In Exodus 22:2-3 we read:

"If a thief be found breaking up, and be smitten that he die, there shall no blood be shed for him. If the sun be risen upon him, there shall be blood shed for him; for he should make full restitution; if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft."

In other words, homeowners are allowed by God's Law to defend themselves against burglars who break in at night.

"If a thief broke a house in the night, and was killed in the doing of it, his blood was upon his own head, and should not be required at the hand of him that shed it, v. 2. As he that does an unlawful act bears the blame of the mischief that follows to others, so likewise of that which follows to himself. A man's house is his castle, and God's law, as well as

man's, sets a guard upon it; he that assaults it does so at his peril."
Matthew Henry's Commentary on Exodus 22:2

LESSONS FROM JESUS

In Luke 22:36 Jesus commanded His disciples to be armed for self-defense.

"Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one."

Jesus commanded his disciples to buy swords, if they had none. They said they already had two, and Jesus said that would be enough. As a band of a dozen able-bodied men, they were quite safe from roving bandits, even if every man in the group was not carrying a weapon. The application is that Jesus commands us to be armed for self-defense, but He does not recommend that we go overboard with our weapons. Jesus said in another place, "He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword." Jesus encourages his followers to defend themselves, but He does not encourage us to be eager for battle and bloodshed. Self-defense may be necessary as a last resort, but violence should not be sought after and relished. God's people are supposed to be peacemakers, not ruffians. Neither are we allowed to spread the Gospel by means of violence or military aggression.

The Old Bible Commentators agree that Jesus was authorizing armed self-defense in Luke 22:36.

Adam Clarke:

"Judea was at this time, as we have already noticed, much infested by robbers: while our Lord was with his disciples, they were perfectly safe, being shielded by his miraculous power. Shortly they must go into every part of the land, and will need weapons to defend themselves against wild beasts, and to intimidate wicked men, who, if they found them totally defenceless, would not hesitate to make them their prey, or take away their life."

Lightfoot:

"He warns them of a danger that is very near; and in a common way of speech lets them know that they had more need of providing swords for their defence against the common enemy, than be any way quarrelling amongst themselves."

And why is two enough? Because they were a large band of men, and not likely to be set upon by robbers.

Of course, Peter was wrong to do as he did, and try to stop Jesus' arrest by violence. But not because physical self-defense was wrong. It was wrong because it was necessary for our Savior to be taken, and to die for our sins, and Jesus had already told Peter and the other disciples that.

LESSONS FROM PAUL

"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

I Timothy 5:8

We must provide food and shelter for our families. It is also our duty to provide protection from criminals. The most effective way to do this is to move your family to a safe neighborhood. Also, we should make sure our communities have effective law enforcement officers. But what would you do if a criminal broke into your home? Are you prepared to defend your family?

We pray for God to provide for us; but that does not excuse us from earning money, buying food and building houses. We pray for God to defend us from criminals, but that does not excuse us from taking steps to protect our families.

In Proverbs 25:26, we read: "A righteous man who falters before the wicked is like a murky spring and a polluted well." Certainly, we would be faltering before the wicked if we chose to be unarmed and unable to resist an assailant who might be threatening our life. In other words, we have no right to hand over our life, which is a gift from God, to the unrighteous. It is a serious mistake to equate a civilized society with one in which the decent people are doormats for the evil to trample on." ([Colonel William Flatt](#))

PRESERVING YOUR RIGHT TO KEEP AND BEAR ARMS

The importance of preserving your right to keep and bear arms is illustrated in I Samuel 13:19-22.

"Now there was no smith found throughout all the land of Israel: for the Philistines said, Lest the Hebrews make them swords or spears: But all the Israelites went down to the Philistines, to sharpen every man his share, and his coulter, and his ax, and his mattock. Yet they had a file for the mattocks, and for the coulters, and for the forks, and for the axes, and to sharpen the goads. So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan: but with Saul and with Jonathan his son was there found."

The Philistines conquered and dis-armed the Israelites. They even took away the means of weapons production, in order to enslave them. But some Israelites had kept their weapons "illegally." In order to revolt and become free men, the few Israelites who had weapons attacked some Philistines and took their weapons. This process continued until many Israelites had arms. It is impossible to overthrow tyrants and have a free society unless the citizens have firearms.

In the Constitution of the United States we find the "Bill of Rights." It is vital for every Christian to realize that all our rights actually come from God. The government never gives you rights, but only recognizes rights you already have, or tries to take your rights away from you, to increase its power.

The second Amendment of the Constitution, the second right enumerated in the Bill of Rights, is the right to "keep and bear arms." If enough Americans will exercise their rights, especially the right to keep and bear arms, we may prevent our government from becoming a dictatorship. If the government begins registering, and then confiscating everyone's weapons, then don't be surprised at the tyranny that will soon follow.

AN OBJECTION ANSWERED

Someone may ask: "But what about turning the other cheek and not resisting evil? Aren't Christians supposed to always act like that?"

The answer is simple: No. In those verses Jesus was telling Christians how to react to minor insults: a slap on the cheek, the loss of a coat, and so on. He was not addressing the Christian's response to criminal activity. He did that when He said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

If we love our neighbors, we will take steps to keep them safe from criminals. We will support our local police. Instead of taking vengeance personally, we will call on the police to find and arrest criminals. But when criminals attack us, and the police are not there, we will do what it takes to stop them, not just for our own sake, but for the sake of our families, and our neighbors. To dis-arm and to allow criminals to attack us and our neighbors unopposed is to be negligent about our Christian duty. Cities which forbid weapons to law-abiding citizens are playing into the hands of criminals. Gun control makes no one safer except the criminals, who never turn in *their* guns.

In the Larger Catechism, Answer # 135 we read that "The duties required in the sixth commandment" include "just defence against violence." Self-defense is not only our privilege as a Christian, it is our duty.

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