

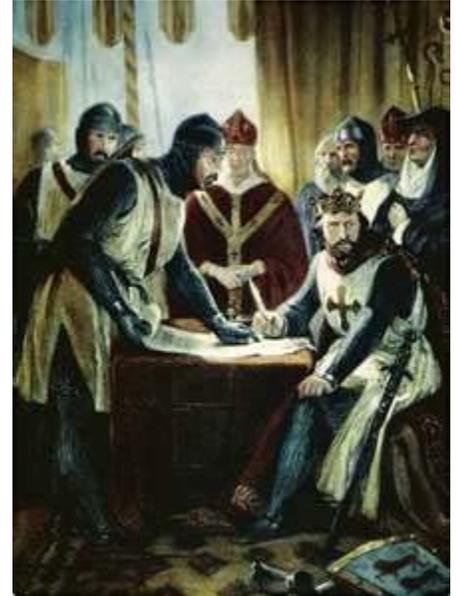
# Magna Carta, Jerusalem & the Crusades

By Bill Federer

On JUNE 15, 1215, England's barons surrounded King John on the plains of Runnymede and forced his to sign the Magna Carta, the Great Charter of English Liberties.

British judge, Lord Denning, described the Magna Carta as "the greatest constitutional document of all times - the foundation of the freedom of the individual against the arbitrary authority of the despot."

The Magna Carta was the first time in history that the unlimited and unpredictable power of a king was handcuffed, and the process began of guaranteeing individual rights under a rule of law which eventually culminated in the United States Constitution.



The Magna Carta ends:

"...for the salvation of our souls, and the souls of all our...heirs, and unto the honor of God."

Interested in knowing what led up to this, and how Jerusalem figures into the story? Read more...

Jerusalem had been a Jewish city since time of King David around 1000 BC, and it had been a Christian city since Emperor Constantine, 313 AD.



Muslims under Caliph Umar took Jerusalem away from the Byzantine Patriarch Sophronius and forced Christian and Jewish inhabitants to live as second-class citizens under a set of "Jim Crow" style laws called "dhimmi."

Christian pilgrims began to be harassed, massacred and crucified. In the 700's, Christians were banned from giving religious instruction to their children and displays of the cross were banned in Jerusalem.

In 772 AD, Caliph al Mansur ordered Jews and Christians to be branded on the hand.



In 923, Muslims began destroying churches in Jerusalem. On Palm Sunday in 937, Muslims plundered the Church of Calvary and the Church of the Resurrection.

In 1004, Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah began a ten year persecution where thousands were forced to convert or die and 30,000 churches were destroyed. In 1009, Caliph al-Hakim destroyed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

In 1075, the Muslim Seljuk Turks captured Jerusalem from Arab Muslims. Gregory Bar-Hebraeus (1226-1286), a Syrian Orthodox Church leader, wrote how Seljuk Turkish Muslims initially tolerated Christians tolerably, then:

"...having seen very much modesty and other habits of this kind among Christian people, certainly the Mongols loved them greatly at the beginning of their kingdom, a time ago somewhat short. But their love hath turned to such intense hatred."

Travelers returning from pilgrimages to the Holy Land shared reports of Muslim persecution of "dhimmi" Christians.

Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Egypt, which had all been Christian lands, were conquered by Muslims, who then conquered Sicily.



In 1057, the Norman adventurer Robert Guiscard took control of Calabria in the "toe of Italy" and fought against the Muslims of Sicily.

Italian city-states of Pisa, Genoa and Catalonia fought the Muslims who were raiding Italy's coasts, Majorca, Sardinia, and Catalonia.

In 1071, the Muslims inflicted a major defeat on the Byzantine Christians at the Battle of Manzikert and took control of all but the coastlands of Asia Minor.

Cries begging for help were carried back to Europe. Europe sent help, it was called the Crusades. There were nine major Crusades and numerous minor ones, from 1095 till 1291, when Acre was finally captured by the Muslims.

The First Crusade began when, in desperation, the proud Byzantine Emperor Alexius I



Comnenus humbled himself and sent ambassadors to the Council of Piacenza in March of 1095, appealing for aid from his religious rival, the Roman Catholic Pope. The seriousness of this call for help is underscored by the fact that it occurred just a few years after the Great East-West Schism where the Byzantine Church and the Roman Catholic Church split.



Pope Peter II preaches the First Crusade

Pope Urban II gave an impassioned plea at the Council of Clermont in 1095 for Western leaders to set aside their doctrinal differences and come to the aid of their Byzantine Christians brethren. He described how Muslims "compel to extend their necks and then, attacking them with naked swords, attempt to cut through the neck with a single blow." (Robert the Monk, Medieval Sourcebook, Fordham University.)

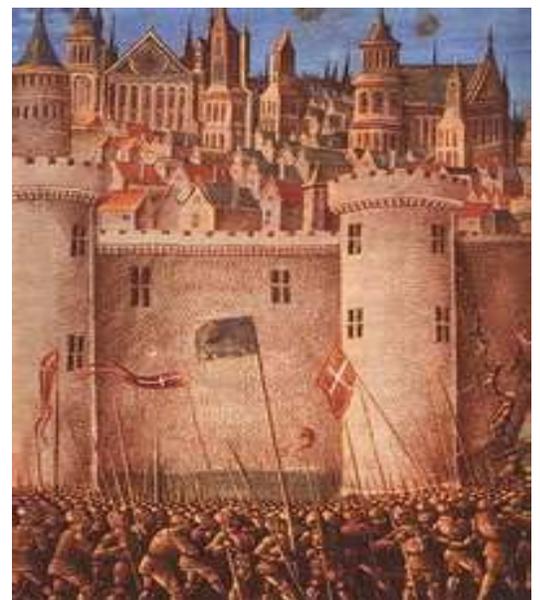
With Spain exuberant after successfully driving the Muslims from Toledo and Leon a few years earlier, the First Crusade began in 1097, led by Godfrey of Bouillon. It freed Iconium from the Muslims, though it was later lost.



The First Crusade defeated Turkish forces at Dorylaeum and Antioch, and captured Jerusalem in 1099, holding it for nearly 100 years.

After Muslims conquered Edessa, another crusade was called for by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1147. It was made up of French and German armies, led by King Louis VII and Conrad II.

In 1148, Muslim leader, Nur ed-Din, slaughtered every Christian in Aleppo. The Second Crusade failed to take Damascus and returned to Europe in 1150. Bernard of Clairvaux was disturbed by reports of misdirected violence toward some Jewish populations.





On July 4, 1187, Saladin captured Crusaders at Hattim and ordered their mass execution.

In 1190, Pope Gregory VIII called for a Third Crusade. It was led by German King Frederick I, called Frederick Barbarossa (meaning Redbeard), who was the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. He was joined by Richard I of England and Philip II of France.

Frederick led 100,000 soldiers across Byzantium, driving out Muslims and temporarily freeing Iconium. He most likely would have freed Jerusalem had he not fallen off his horse while crossing the Göksu River in Cilicia, Asia Minor. Being 67 years old and weighted down with heavy armor, he drowned in waist deep water and the Crusade went into confusion.

Richard the Lionheart was suddenly in charge leading the Crusade and successfully captured Acre. Due to rivalries, Philip II, without warning, abandoned the Crusade and returned to France in 1191.

Richard's troops came within sight of Jerusalem in 1192, but grew weary as it did not look like they were making an impact. Then word came to Richard that Phillip II was trying to take away Normandy from England, so Richard quickly ended the Crusade to go back and defend his kingdom.

Richard later discovered Saladin was on the verge of defeat and was propping up dead soldiers along the walls.



Saladin allowed some Christians to leave Jerusalem if they paid a ransom, but according to Imad al-Din, approximately 15,000 could not pay their ransom and were enslaved.

Richard sailed away, but was shipwrecked and had to travel on foot across Europe in disguise.

He was recognized near Vienna and captured by Duke Leopold V of Austria. The Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI, imprisoned Richard at Dumstein for three years.



Legend has it that Richard's loyal minstrel, Blondel, traveled from kingdom to kingdom across Europe trying to find him by singing Richard's favorite song. When Richard heard the song, he sang the second verse from the prison tower, and was found.

Richard's brother, King John, had to raise taxes for the "king's ransom." This was the origins of the story of Nottingham, Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood.

The Holy Roman Emperor, Henry VI, prepared for another crusade in 1197, but died from malaria.

Once back in England, Richard ruled only a few years before being shot with an arrow during the siege of a castle in Normandy.

His brother, King John, raised taxes and ruled oppressively. When he lost Britain's claim to Normandy after the Battle of Bouvines in 1214, English barons were upset, as they also lost their titled lands there.

Angry barons then surrounded King John on the plains of Runnymede on JUNE 15, 1215, and forced him to sign the Magna Carta - the cornerstone of English liberty.

And as we learn more about those who lived before us, we care more about what we are leaving to those who will live after us.

