



THE WALDENSIANS

Christians of the Alps

Lights In The Darkness

Stories of Early Christian History

Book 2

Introduction to the *Lights in Darkness* Christian History Booklets

The Bible tells us about Jesus' disciples and the work they did after Jesus returned to heaven. But what happened to the Christian church after the disciples died. What is the history of Christianity that happened after the Bible was written? In these booklets we will see what the early history of Christianity was.

These booklets are based on the historical book the Great Controversy as well as sometimes other historical books.

In the northwestern part of the country of Italy there is an area called Piedmont. In Piedmont there are many tall mountains and also many valleys. For hundreds of years these beautiful mountains were the home of a group of true Christians who are called the Waldensians or Waldenses. They were the largest and most well-known group of Christians who kept the light of truth burning during the Dark Ages.



For many years the Christian churches in the Piedmont valleys refused to follow the Catholic church and its teachings. They only believed in the Bible and what it taught. But after many years the Roman Catholic Church forced many of these churches to give up the Bible and follow the Catholic teachings.

But many of the people in the Piedmont churches still didn't want to follow the pope. They left the Piedmont churches and villages that had joined Rome. Some of these faithful Christians went to live in other countries. But many moved into the mountains of the Piedmont where they lived hidden away in the woods and rocks of the mountains.

The beliefs of the Waldensian Christians were very different from the Catholic Church. The Waldensian's

beliefs were from the Bible. They didn't believe in the traditions that the church taught. They believed only the Bible could say what people should believe. Like the early Christians, many of them kept the seventh-day Sabbath like the Bible teaches. They also did not worship images of saints or idols like the Catholic church did. For hundreds of years the Waldensian Christians stood strong for their beliefs which they had learned from the early Christian church.

The Waldensian Christians were the first people in Europe to have the Bible translated into their language, the Romaunt language. Their Bible was a pure Bible. The fact that they had a good Bible and believed the Bible made the Roman church hate them. Many times the Roman church sent armies to destroy the Waldensian Christians but often the mountains

protected them. They could hide in caves or high in the mountains where they couldn't be found easily.

The Waldensians were true and faithful Christians. They loved God and His truth more than anything. The Bible was very important to the Waldensians. Even the small children



were taught the Bible and often learned to say large parts of it from memory. Since there were not many copies of the Bible, the older children and adults learned to say whole books of the Bible from memory. They often had the whole books of Matthew and John memorized.

The Waldensian parents also taught the small children lessons about

God from nature. The children were taught to be thankful to God for all the blessings He gave them.

The life of the Waldensians was filled with danger. Many Waldensian children and babies were taken away from their parents to be raised by those who didn't believe the truth of the Bible. Because they might be taken away from their parents, the Waldensians taught their children while very small to love Jesus and obey the Bible. Children also had to learn when they were very young to be careful what they said. They learned while very small how to live in hard times. They learned to be obedient, but also to think for themselves. They must be ready at all times to stand faithful to God.

The Waldensians were not rich, they lived as poor people in the

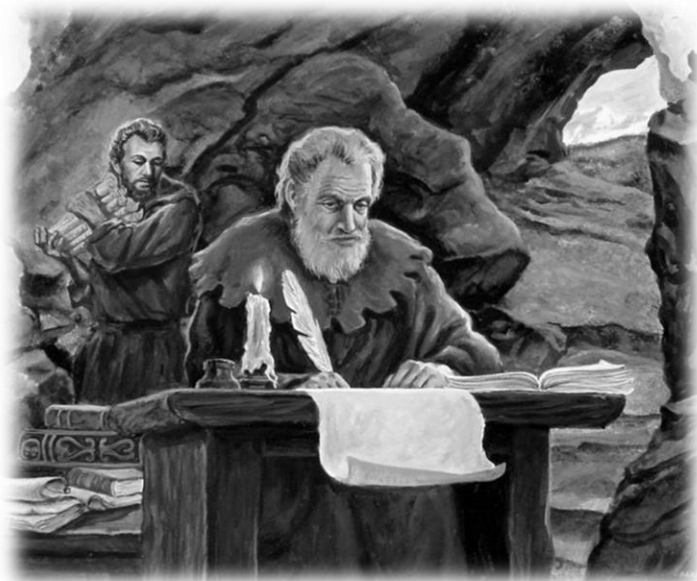
mountains. They had to work hard to provide for their families. Every part of the mountains they could, they turned into gardens and fields to grow food.

The Waldensian churches were like the early Christian churches. The pastors of the Waldensian churches were not like the priests of the Roman church. They were not rich and did not put themselves higher than the people. Instead the pastors took care of the people. They preached the truth to the people. They taught the children the truth and also visited the sick. And they worked to make sure everyone was living together in love.

Sometimes the pastors were given offerings from the people to help them live. But sometimes times were hard and the people could not give enough to the pastor for him to live off of. But all the Waldensian pastors knew some

other sort of work they could do. Like Paul who made tents they had other jobs they could do and would work if there wasn't enough money from the people.

The pastors also taught the schools. The young Waldensians studied many things, but the Bible was always the most important to them. Since the Bible had to be written by hand, often times the students wrote out copies of the Bible. This sometimes was done in caves where they were hiding from their enemies. It was a lot of work to write out the whole Bible and so they would often write out smaller parts of the Bible.



Some of the young Waldensians were sent out as missionary students to attend schools in other places. This was very dangerous and there were many temptations in these schools. But their parents had trained them from when they were little children to be faithful to God.

These students carried parts of the Bible they had written. The pieces of the Bible were sewed carefully into their clothes. When they found people who wanted to learn about the truth they shared these parts of the Bible with them. Many people learned about the truth from these Waldensian missionary students.

The Waldensians sent out other missionaries as well. Every young man who wanted to be a pastor had to spend three years as a missionary first. These missionaries were sent out two

by two like Jesus sent out His disciples. Often it would be an older man and a young man. These two men could not always be at the same place but they would meet and pray together often.

If it was known that they were missionaries, they would not be allowed to share the truth. So that people wouldn't know they were missionaries, they would do other jobs. They often went from place to place selling things like fancy cloth or jewels. While they were doing this work, they would meet people who they thought would be interested in the truth. Then the Waldensian missionaries would share the truth with these people, often showing them the parts of the Bible which were carefully hidden in their clothing.

Some Waldensian missionaries also were minstrels. Minstrels were men



who traveled from place to place sharing the news of what was happening in the world by singing it. The Waldensian minstrels wouldn't just share the news. They had parts of the Bible which they had turned into songs and they would also sing these sharing the truth of the Bible.

The Waldensian missionaries traveled to many places in many countries. They spread God's word everywhere they went. They knew the people were living in the darkness of error and they wanted to give them the light of truth.

The people in that time were taught that God was very strict and not loving. They were taught that their

works would save them, and so the people tried to get forgiveness from God by fasting or whipping themselves. Of course, these people could never get forgiveness this way. Sadly, many of the people died trying to be forgiven but never being set free from their sins.

The Waldensians knew what the people were being taught and wanted these people to learn that only Jesus could save them. They wanted them to learn about the promises of God. They wanted them to learn about the love of God for them and that they could come to Christ and He would forgive their sins and cleanse them from their sins **(1 John 1:9)**.

All these things the Waldensian missionaries would teach the people when they could. They would show them parts of the Bible they had

handwritten that had messages of peace and hope for the people. To the people who had only heard the errors of the Catholic Church, these words of the Bible were special, and they would often have the missionary read them over and over again. One of the verses that people wanted them to read over and over again was, *"The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (**1 John 1:7**)

Many of the people who the Waldensians missionaries taught began to believe in Jesus. They no longer trusted in their own works to save them but trusted only in Jesus. They were very happy and praised Jesus for His great love.

Sometimes the Waldensian missionary could only share with one person, sometimes he could share with a small group of people. He had to

share in secret, but to whoever he could he would share. Sometimes he would spend whole nights sharing with the people who wanted to hear the truth of God's word. After he shared with the people, he would go away to find more people who wanted to hear the truth.

Very often the people never saw the Waldensian missionaries again. The missionaries went to other towns and countries to other places to share the gospel. Sometimes they were caught and thrown in jail. Sometimes they were killed. But the parts of the Word of God that they left with the people kept working in the people's lives as they read and studied it. Many, many people learned the gospel and became true Christians because of the work the Waldensian missionaries did.

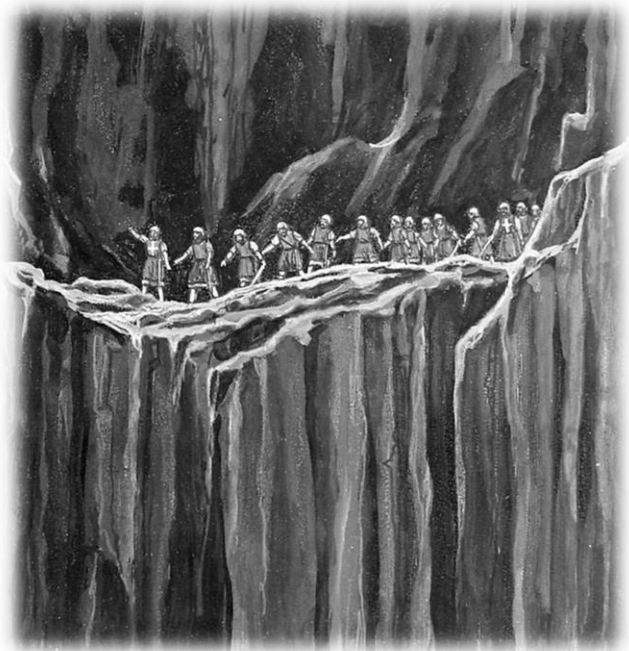
But the missionary work that the Waldensians were doing made Satan and his followers angry. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church didn't want the Waldensians to spread the truth they had.

Again and again armies were sent into the valleys where the Waldensians lived. They wanted to destroy all the Waldensians. The fields and houses of the Waldensians were burned with fire. The soldiers hunted for them all through the woods of the mountains. Thousands of the Waldensians were killed. Thousands more were sent to jails and many died in jail.

The armies sent to destroy the Waldensians were not just made from soldiers. The pope promised that anyone who would join these armies would be forgiven for anything bad they had ever done. He said that

thieves who had stolen something would not be punished and could keep the stolen thing, as long as they helped kill the Waldensians. Because of what the pope said, many thieves and murderers and other evil men joined these armies.

But even though many Waldensians were killed, there were many times that God protected them. God had put the Waldensians in the mountains and God often used the mountains to protect them. One time a group of soldiers was searching for Waldensians who were hiding high in the mountains. The Waldensians knew the small mountain paths but the soldiers didn't know the



paths. Then a thick cloud of fog came in and covered the path the soldiers were on. They could not see and many of them fell off the cliffs or became lost. Very few of the soldiers were ever seen again. But the Waldensians were above the fog in the sunshine. They could see and they praised God for saving them from their enemies.

The Waldensians were not killed because they were bad people. Even their enemies knew they were good Christians who were peaceful and loving. They were killed or thrown in jail because they would not give up the Bible truths and follow what the pope said. It was for this reason that they were hated so much.

But although many died, the pope and the Roman Catholic church could not get rid of all the Waldensians. God protected them and there was always

some living and teaching the truth. For hundreds of years the Waldensian Christians lived and sent out missionaries and spread the light of truth all over Europe. The Waldensians kept the lamp of truth burning brightly until the time of the Reformation. At the time of the Reformation more people, like John Wycliffe and Martin Luther stood up for God and helped to keep the light of truth burning.

Today, we can learn many important lessons from the Waldensian Christians. They were very faithful to God even when they were killed for their faith. And they did not just want to believe the truth for themselves. They wanted to share it with everyone.

One day it will be dangerous to believe and share the truth with people all over the world. In some countries it is already dangerous to

believe and follow the gospel. But soon that danger will be all over the world. The Bible tells us in the last days before Jesus comes people who follow the truth will again be put in jail and killed by the false Christians who follow error **(Revelation 13:15; 20:4)**. But we can learn from the Waldensians to be faithful to God no matter what happens to us. Like them we should always learn the Bible truths and share those truths with all the people we can.

Will you be faithful to God and share the truths of the Bible with someone today?



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