

## ***How the Bible Came to Us - #12***

### ***The “Underground Church” in Medieval Times***

1. When Emperor Constantine rose to power early in the 4<sup>th</sup> century in Rome and declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire, everything was turned upside down. In order to make it easier for pagans to accept Christianity, Christians were required to worship on the same day as the pagans had been worshipping—the venerable day of the sun. While at first it seemed to be a great triumph for Christianity, before long, faithful Christians began to realize that Christianity was being severely diluted and changed.
2. Within about 200 years, the entire western European world came under the control of the Roman Church. Slowly but surely, almost all Christendom joined hands with this apostate power. But, there were a few groups who never submitted to Rome's power.
3. Columba was born in Ireland to parents who had royal blood. He received a very good education in the monastery schools and became a scholar of distinction with a saintly reputation and even achieved fame as a miracle worker. He worked in Ireland for about 20 years and then set out with a group of 12 companions for Scotland. They arrived on the small island of Iona in 563. His small group overpowered the Druids who were there, secured independence for the Scots from the Picts, brought civilization to a then lawless people, greatly improved their agriculture, and spread the gospel among them. In order to better spread the gospel, he introduced a written form of the Gaelic language using the written materials to spread the gospel. He was known as being so full of life that he was called the “saint of the young.” One of his favorite jobs was copying Scripture. He finally passed away in 597 while copying the Bible.
4. From that small school in Iona, missionaries were sent out all over the Roman Empire, even as far away as Italy. One of the group at Iona was a person who had accepted the Sabbath of the Bible. He introduced that teaching and it was widely accepted in that school. About a century later in 1066, the Saxons invaded Britain, bringing Catholicism with them. Through war, intrigue, and deception, the emissaries from Rome finally managed to eliminate the primitive biblical faith from Britain and turned it into a Catholic nation.
5. In far-off Ethiopia, Christians had established areas where they could worship God much removed from the influences of Rome and Constantinople. Another such group had established itself in Armenia. Being somewhat removed from the influences of the powerful emperors and churches, those remote groups tended to respect the Sabbath of the Bible and maintained a fairly pure Christianity.
6. When the Roman Church rose to religious and secular power, it eventually turned to persecuting those who did not agree with it. Some of the people who were persecuted escaped to far distant places, and in the process they carried the gospel to those places.
7. Others retreated to the mountains in northwestern Italy. For a thousand years, various groups worked in the narrow, high-altitude valleys of the Piedmont Mountains and cherished a true faith in the Bible. They sincerely prized their freedom of religion. Among the mountains they found caves in which they could hide large groups of people and be almost undetected.
8. They came to be known later as the Waldenses. The name came from Peter Waldo who was born in about 1150 and died in 1218. Beginning about 1173, he served as a mendicant preacher. He preached a simple gospel in the area of southeastern France, focusing often on strong criticism of the prevailing church abuses. Waldo attracted ever-increasing numbers of adherents. They were referred to as “the poor men of Lyons” or “the poor in spirit.”

9. One of the things which set them apart from other splinter groups of the Catholic Church was that they used a vernacular French translation of the Scriptures. They refused to use the authorized Latin Bible. On several occasions between 1179 and 1184, they tried to become recognized as a legitimate church group. However, in 1184 Pope Lucius III excommunicated the entire group. After that excommunication, they were heavily persecuted. At that time they retreated into the mountainous regions on the borders of France and Italy. Their religion was generally orthodox and in many important ways they were precursors to the Protestant Reformation. In general, those mountain groups regarded the Bible which they had in their own vernacular language as their sole authority.
10. Waldensian parents recognized that if their children were to survive, they would have to learn to live a life of trial and hardship, forsaking self-indulgence and eventually, perhaps even experiencing a martyr's death.
11. They establish schools where they could teach general educational subjects but made the Bible their chief textbook. Every student was expected to memorize the Gospels of Matthew and John. Many of the students were able to repeat large portions of both the Old and the New Testaments. They learned how to copy those passages from memory, sometimes writing down a paragraph or two of explanation of the text which they had copied.
12. Some of the children of the Waldenses were chosen to attend "worldly" universities. Before going they had to be firmly established in biblical truth. Portions of Scripture were often sewn into their garments. Usually quietly, they shared their views and the Bible with others. Some entire schools were converted to their beliefs, but the Roman authorities despite their best efforts could not determine who had introduced that new view.
13. From their hideouts in the mountains, some of the Waldenses would go forth quietly and under disguise to people in the villages and cities—usually one older and more experienced worker associating with a younger person—spreading knowledge about the Scriptures. If a young man aspired to be a pastor of a local church somewhere in the high mountains, he first had to serve a period of at least three years as a missionary down in the cities among the "people of the world." Often, they would go out as merchants of silk, lace, and jewels which were not readily available in those days. Thus, they found access to some of the most wealthy and best-educated people in the communities where they traveled. When they saw an opportunity, they would take out a portion of Scripture and introduce their clients to the Word of God.
14. They understood clearly the uselessness of the various sacraments which were so much depended upon by the Roman Church. They rejected the doctrine that somehow, by one's own good works, he could atone for his sins.
15. The teachings of popes and priests had led men to look upon the character of God, and even of Christ, as stern, gloomy, and forbidding. The Saviour was represented as so far devoid of all sympathy with man in his fallen state that the mediation of priests and saints must be invoked. Those whose minds had been enlightened by the Word of God longed to point these souls to Jesus as their compassionate, loving Saviour, standing with outstretched arms inviting all to come to him with their burden of sin, their care and weariness. They longed to clear away the obstructions which Satan had piled up that men might not see the promises, and come directly to God, confessing their sins, and obtaining pardon and peace. {GC 73.1}
16. In secret places the Word of God was thus brought forth and read, sometimes to

a single soul, sometimes to a little company who were longing for light and truth. Often the entire night was spent in this manner. So great would be the wonder and admiration of the listeners that the messenger of mercy was not infrequently compelled to cease his reading until the understanding could grasp the tidings of salvation. Often would words like these be uttered: "Will God indeed accept *my* offering? Will he smile upon *me*? Will he pardon *me*?" The answer was read, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." [MATT. 11:28.] {GC 74.3}

17. The very existence of this people, holding the faith of the ancient church, was a constant testimony to Rome's apostasy, and therefore excited the most bitter hatred and persecution. Their refusal to surrender the Scriptures was also an offense that Rome could not tolerate. She determined to blot them from the earth. Now began the most terrible crusades against God's people in their mountain homes. Inquisitors were put upon their track, and the scene of innocent Abel falling before the murderous Cain was often repeated. {GC 76.1}

Again and again were their fertile lands laid waste, their dwellings and chapels swept away, so that where once were flourishing fields and the homes of an innocent, industrious people, there remained only a desert. {GC 76.2}

18. When Rome at one time determined to exterminate the hated sect, a bull was issued by the pope [INNOCENT VIII., A. D. 1487.] condemning them as heretics, and delivering them to slaughter. They were not accused as idlers, or dishonest, or disorderly; but it was declared that they had an appearance of piety and sanctity that seduced "the sheep of the true fold." Therefore the pope ordered "that the malicious and abominable sect of malignants," if they refuse to abjure, "be crushed like venomous snakes." Did this haughty potentate expect to meet those words again? Did he know that they were registered in the books of Heaven, to confront him at the Judgment? "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren," said Jesus, "ye have done it unto me." [MATT 25:40.] {GC 76.4}

19. This bull called upon all members of the church to join the crusade against the heretics. As an incentive to engage in this cruel work, it "absolved from all ecclesiastical pains and penalties, general and particular; it released all who joined the crusade from any oaths they might have taken; it legitimized their title to any property which they might have illegally acquired, and promised remission of all their sins to such as should kill any heretic. It annulled all contracts made in favor of the Vaudois [Waldenses], ordered their domestics to abandon them, forbade all persons to give them any aid whatever, and empowered all persons to take possession of their property." This document clearly reveals the master spirit behind the scenes. It is the roar of the dragon, and not the voice of Christ, that is heard therein. {GC 77.1}

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