

PAUL CHAPPELL

 U T S I D E R S

15 LEADERS WHO FOLLOWED CHRIST

AND CHANGED THE WORLD



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TIMELINE



John Huss

1369-1415

Peter Waldo

1140-1215

John Wycliffe

1324-1384



Latimer and Ridley

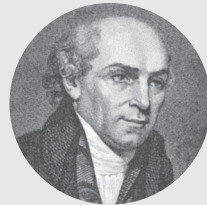
October 16, 1555

John Bunyan

1628-1688

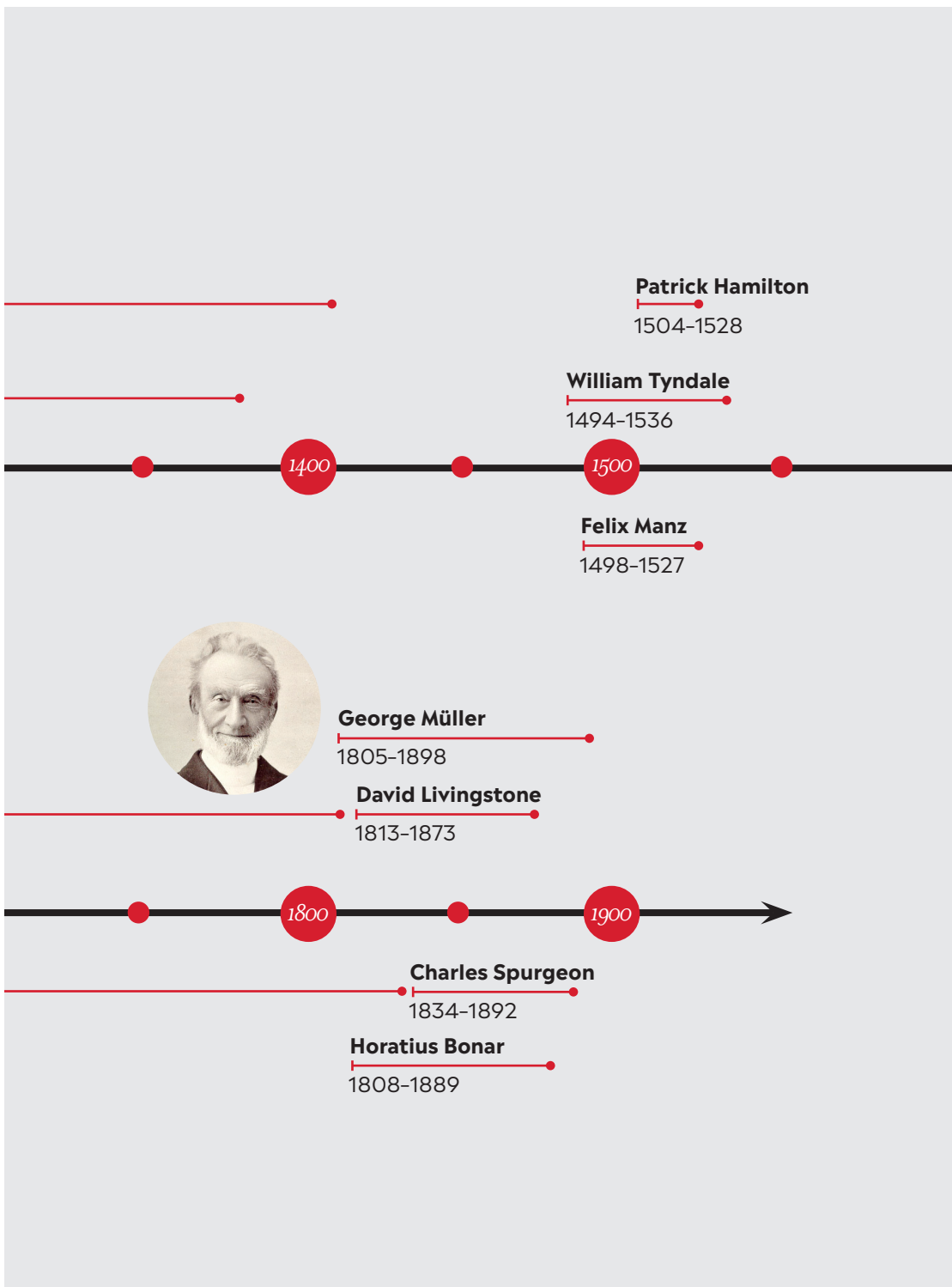
John Newton

1725-1807



William Carey

1761-1834



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To the men and women who
dared to believe during the
darkest times in history and
willingly stood outside the
realms of protection and
organized religion to follow
Christ alone.

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people
with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go
forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his
reproach.—Hebrews 13:12–13

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INTRODUCTION

Just outside the old City of London—the one square mile that was settled by the Romans—lies the nonconformists’ burial ground known as Bunhill Fields.

Today, London is of course built out miles beyond its City of London center. In fact, it surrounds the tiny, four-acre Bunhill Fields and even uses the little cemetery as a thoroughfare for those wanting to take a shortcut from Bunhill Row to City Road, perhaps to get to the Old Street Underground just down the block.

But if you should linger in the cemetery, you’ll find among its headstones such names as Susannah Wesley, John Bunyan, John Rippon (pastor who preceded Charles Spurgeon at the London Baptist Tabernacle), Isaac Watts, and no fewer than seventy nonconformist pastors among its

120,000 graves.¹ Of these, only about 2,000 headstones remain. Many of their names are worn off. Their record is in Heaven.

All of those who are buried in Bunhill Fields had one attribute in common—they were willing to be outsiders. In a period of England’s history when uniformity in loyalty, conviction, and thought was required, these brave men and women dissented. They didn’t do it merely to be obstinate; they did it because they knew a better way. In most cases, this was a decision borne of love for the Lord and deep-seated biblical convictions.

Jesus Himself was an outsider. Like the corpses of the Old Testament sacrifices that were burned outside the Israelite camp, “Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).



John Rippon's Grave: During a 116-year span (1720–1836), the church that Charles Spurgeon would later pastor had a succession of two long-serving pastors: Dr. John Gill and Dr. John Rippon. Both are buried in Bunhill Fields.



Bunhill Fields: This four-acre cemetery in the middle of London was used as a nonconformist burial ground from 1665–1854. The name comes from “Bone Hill” in reference to its prior use as a dumping ground for the nearby St. Paul’s charnel house.

It is our privilege then as His followers to also “go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:13).

This, of course, looks different in every culture and every age. None of us are called to be a seventeenth-century nonconformist in England. But all of us are called to follow Christ, knowing that at some level and in some way it will mean ostracism, misunderstanding, and persecution. “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).

The church itself is a “called out assembly.” This is the meaning of the Greek word Jesus used for *church* (*ekklesia*) when He told Peter, “Upon this rock I will build my *church*; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Indeed, when you look back over history, Christ *has* preserved His church. From the New Testament churches of the first century into even

the Dark Ages, we find local churches, often in pockets of persecuted but courageous bodies of believers, who held to the basic truths of New Testament Christianity and refused to join themselves with the corrupted Roman Catholic Church, operating as true, biblical, autonomous churches.

To be sure, the history of these churches is hard to trace, and there isn't a large amount of written history published during their era because they themselves were persecuted, martyred, and their records burned. As Charles Spurgeon so eloquently preached,

History has hitherto been written by our enemies, who never would have kept a single fact about us upon the record if they could have helped it, and yet it leaks out every now and then that certain poor people called Anabaptists were brought up for condemnation. From the days of Henry II to those of Elizabeth we hear of certain unhappy heretics who were hated of all men for the truth's sake which was in them. We read of poor men and women, with their garments cut short, turned out into the fields to perish in the cold, and anon of others who were burnt at Newington for the crime of Anabaptism. Long before your Protestants were known of, these horrible Anabaptists, as they were unjustly called, were protesting for the "one Lord, one faith, and one baptism." No sooner did the visible church begin to depart from the gospel than these men arose to keep fast by the good old way. . . . At times ill-written history would have us think that they died out, so well had the wolf done his work on the sheep. Yet here we are, blessed and multiplied . . . As I think of your numbers and efforts, I can only say in wonder—what a growth! As I think of the multitudes of our brethren in America, I may well say, What hath God wrought! Our history forbids discouragement.²

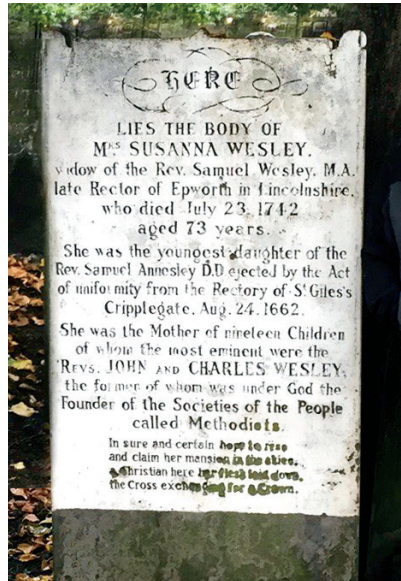
Indeed, from the Montanists in the second century to the Novatians in the third century to the Donatists in the fourth and the Albigenses throughout the Middle Ages, we find Baptist forefathers who

courageously stood for truth and actively proclaimed the Bible. Although some of these groups, or at least some factions of them, misinterpreted and misunderstood significant Bible doctrines, they were stout in their allegiance to Christ and in their operation as called out assemblies of believers.

Many Christians today, however, don't want to be called out. Or more specifically, they don't want to *stand* out. They want to blend in with the world around them. Sometimes this is because of a sincere, but unbiblical, belief that they can better reach the world by being like the world. Jesus, who took on Himself human flesh and perfectly adapted to the first-century Jewish culture, was with the world—He was criticized for being friends with society's rejects (Luke 5:30)—but He never blended in with or absorbed the sinful elements of His culture. “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Hebrews 7:26).

Sometimes Christians today don't want to stand out because of fear. Who wants to be ridiculed, scorned, called a bigot, or ostracized?

The reality is, however, that the men and women who have changed the world have been the men and women the world could not change. A different world cannot be built by indifferent people.



Susannah Wesley's Grave: Susannah Wesley, mother of John and Charles, is buried in Bunhill Fields, along with men such as Isaac Watts and John Bunyan.

In some ways, of course, it's trendy to be "different," but only the kind of different that everyone would like to be—someone who stands up to the system, who differentiates themselves, who is praised as a *radical*.

But what if being an outsider is less of a cultural ideology and more of a courageous conviction? What if it's not about being heralded as a radical, but about being misunderstood as a bigot? What if it doesn't carry praise at all but brings persecution and even death? Is it still worth it?

I believe the stories in this book answer those questions.

I am often asked why preachers and churches today are shifting from the distinctives of their heritage. I believe at times the reason is a desire for acceptance of the world. Other times it is a quest for significance and popularity. Still other times it may be a lack of theological grounding. But I believe there's more. The shift often stems from a profound lack of knowledge about our heritage and the price that has been paid for the faith we hold.

Over the years, God has given me glimpses into church history as I've had opportunity to visit some of the historic locations connected with great leaders of the past. And in these pages, I'm excited to introduce fifteen such leaders to you.

Most of these were Baptists or forerunners to Baptists. Some were directly connected to the Reformation. A few were evangelicals with broader affiliations. All were men who loved the Lord, were committed to His Word, and lived with biblical convictions that ran contrary to culture.

This book is not an exhaustive study of history—Baptist, Reformation, or otherwise. It also doesn't include nearly as many people as I wish it could, including any of the many women who also fit the outsiders' mold. It is simply a collection of introductions—my attempt to acquaint you with a few of the leaders I've studied.

Also, this book is not exhaustive on any of the lives presented. I hope these chapters will pique your interest to read full-length biographies on the people mentioned in these pages. There are a few here of whom very little has been written and of whom I had to piece together bits of research from various places. I've done my best to provide thorough endnotes. Some of the people mentioned led groups or movements that have compromised greatly since the founder's life (such as the Waldensians and Moravians). I don't think it is necessary to point that out in each chapter and have not done so.

Each chapter in this book provides something of an extended biographical sketch, photos of places relevant to that person's life (many of these are pictures my wife Terrie or I have taken), and a few application thoughts. One of the great benefits in studying the lives of those greatly used by God is seeing through their testimonies a living example of God's Word practiced. I'm always asking myself what biblical truths are evidenced in their lives and how I can apply these in my life. As we conclude each biographical sketch in this book, I'll share some of these practical applications that have impacted me from each life.

Although each chapter stands on its own and you do not need to read in order, since they are arranged in historical order, you may gain shades of historical context by reading in sequence.

New Testament Christianity is a counter-cultural faith. It has always been so, and it always will be. I pray that the stories of these men who lived out their faith as outsiders will encourage you to do the same.

PETER WALDO

(c. 1140–c. 1215)

“Our tears are no longer of water; they are of blood; they do not merely obscure our sight, they choke our very hearts.”

Waldensians of Italy

It is a curious fact of history that we owe a great deal to people of whom we know very little.

In Peter Waldo’s case, we don’t even know if his first name was, in fact, Peter. And his last name is uncertain as well—Valdès, Vaudès, or de Vaux are all possibilities. He seems to have been born sometime around 1140 and died sometime between 1205–1218.

But the fact that his life served as a tool to deeply etch the gospel into the unyielding superstitions and fear of the Dark Ages in countries throughout Europe is undeniable.

I had come across Peter Waldo’s name over the years while studying church history, usually as a brief introduction to the significance of the Waldensians as early Baptist forefathers. But it wasn’t until several years ago that Waldo himself first became real to me.



Statue of Peter Waldo in Worms, Germany, memorializing his pre-Reformation gospel ministry.

My wife Terrie and I had spent a few days in Geneva, following the steps of Charles Spurgeon who had preached there as well as the reformers who had been there before him. Realizing that we were only a few hours by train away from the Angrogna Valley, we decided to visit there as well. This is one of the valleys in southeast France and northern Italy where Waldensians had lived for centuries, dating even before the life of Peter Waldo.

As we walked up a stone path to a hidden cave and stooped down to go through the low entrance, we found ourselves inside an area with room for about sixty people. It was in this cave that Waldensians in the twelfth century, during the time of Peter Waldo, met in secrecy from the Roman Catholic authorities to worship, pray, sing, and preach. And it was from this cave, and others like it, that they went out by the hundreds to share the gospel . . . and to be martyred. The price they willingly paid for their faith is convicting to us in twenty-first century comfortable Christianity.

Tucked into the forest of the same valley, we visited a stone hut, built into the contours of the mountainside to conceal it from view, which served as a Waldensian Bible college. In that rough, simple setting, Waldensian young men and women trained for gospel ministry.

This first-hand encounter with the commitment and fortitude of the Waldensians piqued my interest in Peter Waldo. Who was he? And how did his life influence so wide a movement hundreds of years before the Reformation?



Although details of Waldo's early life are blurred to the Dark Ages of history, we find him around 1169 as a wealthy merchant in Lyon, France. He was just under thirty years old, married, and had two daughters. In many ways, his testimony is not unlike Zacchaeus'.

Both Waldo and Zacchaeus were rich through extortion of others. In Waldo's case, it was as a banker who practiced more as a loan shark, becoming wealthy through his neighbors' need. Additionally, he was a cloth merchant with considerable real estate holdings. He was sharp, savvy, and an out-of-the-box thinker.

But God awakened a spiritual hunger within him. An event—of which the details are lost—stirred questions within his heart about death and meeting God. Some say he witnessed a friend suddenly die of a heart attack at a party. Others suggest he heard a troubadour sing about the piety of one of the Catholic saints who died. Whatever sparked his questions, they were there. Waldo couldn't stop wondering if he was ready to meet God.

To find the answers, Waldo searched in two places: a priest and the Bible.

The priest pointed Waldo to Matthew 19:21: "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." Waldo took the verse at direct face value. He told his wife that he was going to sell all he had to follow Christ, but that he would first provide for her and for their daughters. He gave his wife a choice of all his liquid assets or all his

real estate. She chose the real estate, and he sold the rest. After securing an education for his daughters, he made restitution to those he had financially wronged and gave the rest of his money to the poor.

Was this decision an attempt to earn salvation? Or was it, like Zacchaeus, a fruit of repentance and the evidence of a life changed by salvation (Luke 19:8–9)? It’s hard to say—but I believe it was the second, for a simple reason: At the same time Waldo was seeking answers through the priest, he took a step that was no less creative or direct than Zacchaeus’ method of climbing a tree to see Jesus over the crowd. Waldo sought out the Living Word—the Bible itself.

This idea makes a lot of sense to us who have the Bible so easily accessible and with a heritage of those who have pointed to Scripture as the way to God. But for Waldo, this was innovative thinking.

In Waldo’s time, it was a settled assumption that the Catholic Church and her leaders had sole access to the Bible—both physically and spiritually. According to the thinking of the Dark Ages, Church leaders were responsible to discern the Bible’s meaning, and they interpreted it primarily through the paradigm of Church tradition. Tradition, having been practiced so many years and by those who held such power, was surely infallible. The Church would then relay what God wanted of the people to them—no questions asked. Lay people, of course, could not understand the Bible or be responsible to discern truth from heresy.

But if custom and culture would not philosophically dissuade Waldo, there was the matter of practical impossibility: Waldo couldn’t read Latin, at least not well, and the only Bible to which he would have had access was in Latin.

And this is where Waldo made what was to be the most impactful decision of his life: he hired priests to translate the Bible into Franco-

Provençal, the common language of his region. This was a language he *could* read and in which he would soon preach. And this decision opened the door, if only just a crack, letting the light of God's Word shine into the Dark Ages of Europe. Every other great moving of God throughout Europe would have the translation of Scripture at its onset.

If the date of Waldo's salvation is uncertain, the reality of it is not. Soon, he began to preach the blood of Jesus as the complete substitutionary sacrifice for sin. In time, he would also directly preach against works, including the sacraments of the church, as having any part in our salvation.

When I read about Waldo's life and see the similarities between his and Zacchaeus' conversion, I can't help but wonder where Zacchaeus ended up. This I know: both met Jesus, and He transformed their lives.



Waldo devoured God's Word as a starving man discovering a banquet feast. He memorized all four Gospels and some of the epistles and began preaching on the streets. People listened in amazement as, for the first time, they heard the Bible in their own language. The power of Scripture and the simple message of the gospel drew many to faith in Christ.

In between preaching, Waldo put his faith into practice as he spent his time visiting the poor and outcasts of the town, praying and sharing Scripture with them, and ministering to their needs. He had a living faith that exemplified James 1:27: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Those who came to Christ through Waldo's witness began following his example. Most sold their possessions, gave to the poor, and preached everywhere they went. In fact, generous poverty and Bible preaching became the double-hallmark of Waldo's followers.

John Foxe notes that the poverty of the Waldensians was not merely for the sake of poverty itself, but was the natural result of the persecution that followed wherever they went.¹ Before the persecution picked up, however, Waldo had another motive—itinerant ministry. How could he freely travel to preach if he were burdened down with possessions? His great life's purpose was to preach the gospel, and he followed it passionately, preaching in Lyon and as far as he could in surrounding areas.

Of this period in Waldo's life, Stevan Borbone De Bellavilla, a Catholic leader and Waldo's contemporary, disparagingly wrote, "So he succeeded in gathering together men and women, and teaching them the Gospels induced them to do the same. Though they were poor and illiterate, he sent them to preach through the surrounding villages. They, men and women, silly and illiterate, going here and there through the country, entering into the houses, and preaching in the squares and also in the Churches, induced others to do the same."²

And so, through the foolish and weak, "silly and illiterate," God made His gospel known. "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are . . . That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:26–31).

And, as happened from the earliest days of church history recorded in Acts, opposition followed. Waldo's commitment to Christ and determination to preach the gospel would soon take him far beyond Lyon.



Waldensian Cave: Encased in the glass is the Franco-Provençal Bible. This cave is located in the Piedmont Valley and is one in which Waldensians met for church in the twelfth century.



It was initially the practical aspects of the Waldensians' faith, rather than their doctrine, that angered the local priests. That these lay preachers were serving the poor and needy in ways that the clergy had left undone only pointed to the hypocrisy of the priests. Under the pretense of doctrinal differences, the priests complained to the Archbishop of Lyon about these unqualified lay men and women who were going everywhere preaching the Bible from the common language with no doctrinal training.

The result was that Waldo was called before the Archbishop and commanded to cease and desist. His response paralleled another Peter who in Acts 5:29 was similarly forbidden to preach Christ: "Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."

Waldo's response before the Archbishop reveals both his knowledge of the New Testament (he referenced Acts 5:29 as well as Mark 16:15) and his

understanding of and commitment to the Great Commission: “Judge you whether it is lawful before God to obey you rather than God, for we cannot refuse to obey him who hath said, ‘Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’”³

Determined to continue preaching and confident that the Archbishop misunderstood, Waldo traveled to Rome and appealed directly to Pope Alexander III in 1179. The Pope was impressed with Waldo’s genuine piety and granted a convoluted form of approval. Waldo could continue preaching as long as he had the approval of the local bishops (which he, of course, did not).

In this strained form of freedom, the Waldensians continued to preach, and the local authorities continued to command them to stop. And as the cycle continued, people responded to the message of the gospel by the thousands.

In 1184, however, Pope Lucius III (Alexander III’s successor), in a determined effort to stamp out the Waldensians, held a synod in which he excommunicated Waldo and his followers and any who would aid or abet them in their mission.

Lucius’ ruling, however, had two unintended consequences.

First, it helped to develop Waldo’s doctrinal distinctives. Prior to this time, while he preached salvation by grace, it seems he struggled to separate the Catholic sacraments from faith. The synod’s excommunication, however, freed Waldo to study God’s Word, not through the lens of Church tradition, trying to reconcile the two, but through the lens of basic, New Testament instruction and practice.

The result was that whereas previously Waldo had seen himself as a reformer—seeking to bring the Church back to a simple and obedient faith—now he recognized that the Catholic Church was not a New Testament church at all and soon preached against all of its core teachings.

In a short time, Waldo and those he trained would set forth articles of faith that directly countered the Catholic Church. Below is a summary of a list provided by John Foxe:

- That Scripture is the final authority in all matters pertaining to salvation.
- That nothing should be added to Scripture by religious systems for salvation.
- That Jesus is the only Mediator and the saints should not be looked at as mediators.
- That there are only two places of eternal destination—Heaven and Hell—and that purgatory does not exist.
- That baptism and the Lord’s table are the only ordinances of the New Testament church, and they are not part of salvation.
- That prayers for the dead are anti-biblical.
- That the supremacy of the pope above all churches and above government is usurped. (They went further to say, “The church of Rome is the very Babylon spoken of in the Apocalypse; and the pope is the fountain of all errors, and the very antichrist.”)
- That relics, pilgrimages, holy water, and decrees of feasts and fasting and eating restrictions had no place in the church.⁴

Waldo not only preached against these unbiblical doctrines, but he began to plant local churches independent of the Catholic Church.

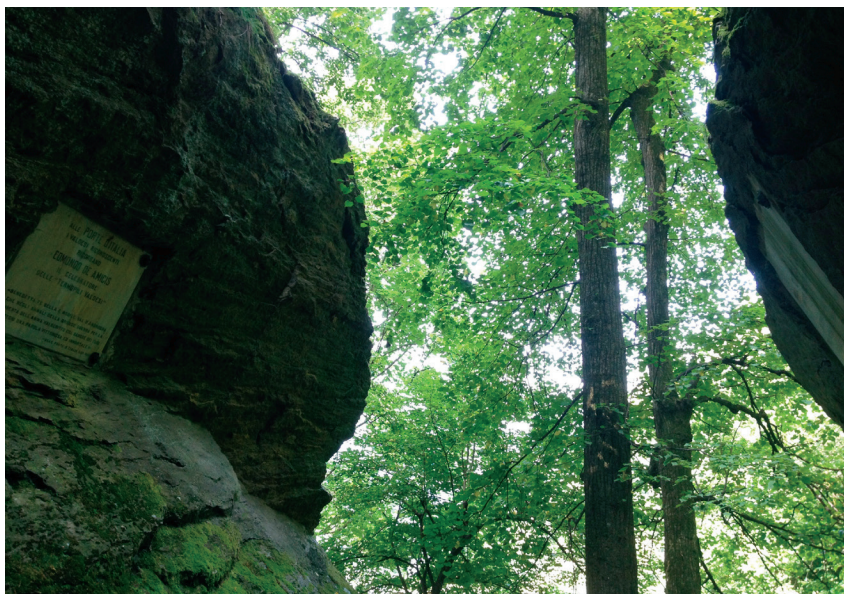
The second God-ordained consequence of the Waldensians’ excommunication was that the persecution which followed drove them across Europe preaching the gospel and planting churches everywhere they went.

I mentioned earlier that the Waldensians actually predate Peter Waldo. (Some historians believe that they are named for the valleys in which they lived rather than after Waldo himself.) It was likely during this

time of persecution and scattering that Peter Waldo and the group from Lyon came to be identified with the *Waldensian* title, as they shared the same doctrine.

In fact, the fierce, harsh persecution had the same effect as Saul's persecution of first-century Christians in the New Testament: "...And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1). The more severe the persecution, the further the gospel spread.

The Waldensians were so passionate to spread the gospel that they found remarkably creative ways to do it.



Piedmont, Italy, where Waldensian Christians were persecuted in the "Massacre of Piedmont." That Waldo's followers were still preaching the gospel four hundred years after his death is testimony to the power of Scripture and the value of a life given over to Christ.

As I mentioned earlier, their Bible colleges were hidden in the mountains. In these stone huts or caves, *barbas* (the colloquial word for *uncle*, as Waldensian pastors and teachers refused the Catholic title of *Father*) would train young men and women for ministry.

I was humbled as I saw the rough benches around the hewn stone podium where the barba would teach from the center. The eager students were not only risking their lives in attending the school, but they were also literally preparing themselves for martyrdom.

In secrecy, the barbas trained their students to read and write in multiple languages and to rightly divide the doctrines of God's Word. Additionally, they taught enough about medicine or trade to enable them to travel with the disguise of a physician or merchant. When they graduated, they would be traveling evangelists, preaching the gospel message to an unfriendly audience. For many of them, it was not a question of if they would be martyred, but of how much they could accomplish before martyrdom came.



Waldo himself moved to Dauphine in southeastern France, where he continued to preach. Later, pushed out of Dauphine, he moved to Picardy in northern France. Here his ministry once again swelled with new converts, so that French King Augustus eventually sent an army to brutally silence them. Waldo managed to move next to Bohemia. Once again, the Lord blessed his preaching and church planting ministry. Some historians claim that there were as many as *forty thousand* Waldensian Christians throughout this region as a direct result of Peter Waldo's gospel and church planting ministry.

From around 1205, there is no further definitely recorded history of Peter Waldo, although John Foxe believes that he died as late as 1218. Did he continue church planting and die of a natural cause? Was he martyred in one of the mass executions carried out against the Waldensians?

We don't know. But we do know that the death of Peter Waldo didn't end the persecution of the Waldensians. For the next seven hundred years, they were fiercely and brutally persecuted with a hatred that could only come from Hell itself.

Near where I visited in the Piedmont valleys of Italy, one of the most-remembered of these persecutions occurred in 1655. In January of that year, the Duke of Savoy forced a cruel choice upon the Waldensians of the lower valleys in Italy—either attend Catholic Mass, or move out of the valley within three days. In the dead of winter, some two thousand people journeyed across swollen rivers, snow-buried valleys, and ice-covered mountains with traces of blood marking their trail—all to avoid compromise.

Waldensians in the upper valleys welcomed the refugees and shared their meager provisions freely. But the worst was yet to come.

In April of the same year, the Duke of Savoy sent an army to the upper valleys. Deceived by accounts of Waldensian resistance, he ordered a gruesome slaughter.

Saturday, April 24, 1655, at 4:00 a.m., the signal was given for a general massacre.

The horrors of this massacre are indescribable. Not content to simply kill their victims, the soldiers and monks who accompanied them invented barbaric tortures: Babies and children had their limbs ripped off their bodies by sheer strength. Parents were forced to watch their children tortured to death before they themselves were tortured and killed. Fathers were forced to wear the decapitated heads of their children as the fathers

were marched to their death. Some of these Christians were literally plowed into their own fields. Some were flayed or burned alive. Many endured worse. Unburied bodies—dead and alive—covered the ground.

Hundreds of the Waldensians fled for a large cave in the towering Mount Castelluzzo. The murderous soldiers, however, found them there and hurled them down the precipice to their death. This is the reference in Milton's famous sonnet to "the bloody Piedmontese that rolled Mother with infant down the rocks."

Survivors of this massacre were few, but they rallied together and wrote to Christians in Europe for help. Their letters included the heart-rending words, "Our tears are no longer of water; they are of blood; they do not merely obscure our sight, they choke our very hearts."⁵

When Oliver Cromwell heard news of the barbaric massacre, he called for a national day of fasting in England and collected money to send to meet the physical needs of the Waldensians.

The poet John Milton honored the brave, uncompromising courage of the Waldensians with a now-famous sonnet:

"On the Late Massacre in Piedmont"

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones;
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow

O'er all th' Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

The direct persecution of Waldensians continued into the seventeenth century. In World War II, these who had known persecution took in Jews who were persecuted. During the Nazi occupation of North Italy, Italian Waldensians actively saved Jews, providing hiding places in the same mountain valley where their own ancestors had found refuge in earlier generations.

Although the Waldensian churches today do not believe what they once did, God used this group of people to keep a light burning for Him and for truth throughout Europe during the Dark Ages. At the time of Peter Waldo's death and in the century after, the Waldensians had active local churches throughout France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Bohemia, Moravia, Poland, Spain, and beyond.

And approximately 150 years after Peter Waldo's death in Bohemia, another man was born in the same region who surely heard the gospel through the witness of the Waldensians. Like Peter Waldo, John Huss would carry the light of truth, and he would allow himself to be extinguished for its blaze.

TRUTHS FOR OUTSIDERS

What do we learn from the life of Peter Waldo?

God's Word is powerful. Waldo is credited with providing the Bible to Europe in the first modern language, outside of Latin. And we see, first through Waldo's conversion and then through his ministry, the supremacy of Scripture. It was Scripture itself that revealed to Waldo the truth of the gospel, and it was the translated Scriptures that the Waldensians carried that allowed them to so powerfully share the gospel with others. The spread of the gospel throughout Europe over the next four hundred years always followed the translation and availability of God's Word in vernacular languages. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29).

True riches are eternal. Even if Waldo did originally liquidate his wealth and give it away to earn salvation, he eventually discovered that it was not enough to buy eternal life (Matthew 16:26). But once he knew Christ, he also realized that temporal wealth was empty, outside of using it to meet basic needs, give to others, and further the work of the gospel. Remember that Waldo had keen business acumen, which is how he became wealthy in the first place. But for the remainder of his life, he chose to live unencumbered by wealth.

Although God does not call all Christians to a lifestyle of poverty, He does call all Christians to generously give to His work and to ". . . lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matthew 6:20–21).

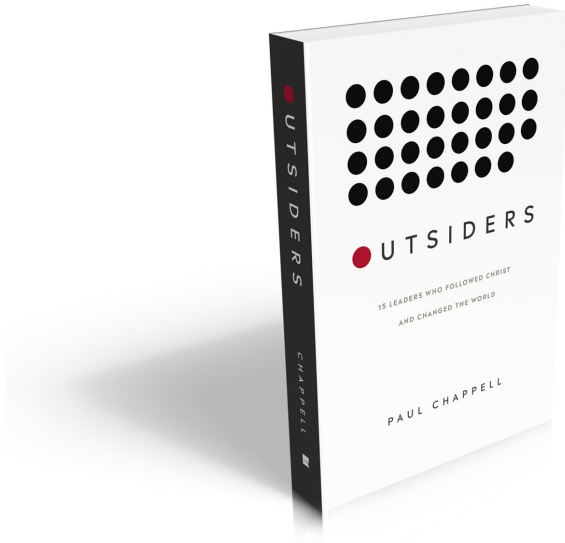
The spread of the gospel depends on its human proclamation.

Waldo could have avoided persecution had he kept his faith to himself. Yet, the spread of the gospel has always depended on the proclamation of the gospel. Paul shared with the Ephesian elders, “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20).

How did Peter Waldo reach so many people with the gospel? How did Waldensians multiply and spread across Europe even under intense persecution? Because Waldo and Waldensians were preachers. They were bold and unashamed to publicly proclaim the gospel.

Christ will build His church. It’s encouraging to remember that the church is indestructible. Jesus told Peter, “. . . upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Under the oppressive reign of the very organization that twisted and abused this promise claiming that the pope was the church’s rock, the Waldensians flourished in the spread of local churches. They were persecuted and slaughtered, but they only grew.

A single spark of light makes a difference in the dark. It’s easy for all of us to question the effectiveness of our lives. Sometimes we see such great spiritual need around us and wonder if we can even make a difference . . . indeed, if we are making a difference. But Waldo’s life is witness to the reality, “The darker the night, the brighter the light.” Don’t let unbelief hinder your effectiveness for Christ. “Let your light so shine . . . That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Matthew 5:16, Philippians 2:15).



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