

CHAPTER 15

“Let's talk about faith,” began Mr. Dell as he leaned back in his chair. “How many of you have faith?”

Several hands slowly went up as students glanced at each other.

“We all have faith,” Mr. Dell assured his class. “In the book of Romans Paul writes that 'God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith' (Romans 12:3).

“Now, question number two: Why do we need faith?”

This time a couple of confident hands went up. “The Bible says that without faith we can't please God (Hebrews 11:6),” Jeremy said.

“And I remember reading that 'whatsoever is not of faith is sin' (Romans 14:23),” said Carrie.

“That's very good,” commended Mr. Dell. “Let's explore this idea of faith a little bit further, class,” Mr. Dell put his elbows on his desk. “Please turn in your Bibles to Hebrews chapter eleven. As you know, this is called the 'faith chapter' of the Bible. Let's see what we can learn about faith.

“Hannah, please read Hebrews 11:6-10,” requested Mr. Dell.

Waiting until the pages quit rustling, Hannah read, “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

“Thanks, Hannah. Let's notice some aspects of faith,” Mr. Dell picked up his Bible. “Notice that faith is a 'doing' word. By faith Noah warned; by faith he prepared an ark. By faith Abraham obeyed and went out; by faith he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God.

“But, have you ever thought that faith can be either active or passive, depending on God's will? In the story of Noah we see active faith. Noah is preaching and building a boat like God instructed him. But in the story of Abraham he needed to *wait* for the promised son. Abraham and Sarah didn't show faith when they decided to help God produce an heir, did they? Ishmael could never be the promised child because he wasn't born of faith.

“Aaron, will you read our next passage for us. Please read verses 32 – 35.”

“And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

“Thanks, Aaron. These are the favorite stories in the Bible. We love the suspenseful story of Daniel being thrown into the lion's den and how his three friends passing unscathed through Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Does anyone have a story of God's protection that you would like to share with the class?” questioned Mr. Dell.

Several hands went up around the classroom. “Jay, why don't you share your story with us.”

“Well, last year my sister and her friend were coming home from school. They were stopped at a red light and at the exact moment that her light changed to green my sister's cell phone rang. She decided to take an extra second or two and answer the call. Just as she flipped open her phone a huge truck roared through the intersection across my sister's path. If she and her friend had been in the intersection they would almost certainly have been killed.”

“Wow!” “Scare-y!” “They sure were lucky!” exclaimed various students in the class.

“We're glad that everything turned out well, Jay. Hearing stories like that reminds me how dependent we are on holy angels to protect us from harm,” remarked Mr. Dell. “But let's continue reading the next verses in Hebrews. Emily, please read verses 36 – 39 for us.”

Emily cleared her throat. “And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.”

“Whoa! What did these verses say?” Mr. Dell's eyebrows lifted in pretended surprise. “Is this saying that through faith some of God's children endured mockings and scourgings and imprisonment? That some were martyred through faith, while others lived in caves or tried to survive in inhospitable deserts? Doesn't faith mean that God's people will be protected from bad things?”

Most of the class shook their heads. Cory raised her hand. “Sometimes God allows what appear to be 'bad things'. It takes faith to trust that He will work everything out in the end.”

“Give me an example,” Mr. Dell said.

“Well, when Stephen was stoned, I'm sure the disciples were pretty sad about it,” explained Cory. “Yet look what happened because of Stephen's death – Saul was converted and became Paul - the guy who won so many people to Jesus.”

“How true,” agreed Mr. Dell.

“And remember the story of Job,” volunteered Carrie. “He sure didn't understand what was happening to him, but he trusted in God even when things were bad.”

“My mom tells a story from her college days,” Ashley contributed. “A young child accidentally fell off a horse wagon and was run over. Nothing could be done - he died right there at the scene. My mom said that although the family was very shaken up by the horrible accident they stood with their arms around each other and quietly sang together the doxology. I can't imagine singing 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow...' after such a tragic death, but Mom said the family wanted others to know that they trusted God even though they didn't understand why He had allowed such a horrible accident.”

Mr. Dell cleared his throat. “That type of surrender to God and His will is something that each saint will have to learn.” Mr. Dell shuffled through some papers on his desk. “Here, let me read you a quote that I really like. It is found in 2MCP 473. It says: 'Our heavenly Father measures and weighs every trial before He permits it to come upon the believer. He considers the circumstances and the strength of the one who is to stand under the proving and test of God, and He never permits the temptations to be greater than the capacity of resistance.' If we accept the fact that everything that happens to us has gone through Christ's hands, then we will trust that in the end everything will be for good – even if it doesn't seem good *now*.”

“Does anyone else have another thought to share?”

“Sometimes it seems as if people look to the good things – blessings – in their life as evidence that they are close to God and that He loves them,” Jeremy tried to put his thoughts into words. “When something bad happens those kind of people often question their faith and lose their grasp on God. Yet in the Bible some of the best Christians went through some of the worst experiences. Peter was thrown in jail and later crucified upside down, Isaiah was put into a hollow log and sawed in half, Paul was stoned, imprisoned and whipped and even Jesus was lied about, harassed and finally killed. I think we all need a faith that is stronger than appearances and feelings.”

“Well put, Jeremy. And I'm sure that is how the Waldenses felt,” agreed Mr. Dell. “They saw themselves as part of the great controversy taking place between Christ and Satan. They knew that if they followed the teachings of the Bible that they would experience the devil's wrath. But they also

knew that Jesus sees everything and He asks, 'Why do you persecute Me?'



<http://dedication.www3.50megs.com/jpg/martyrs.jpg>

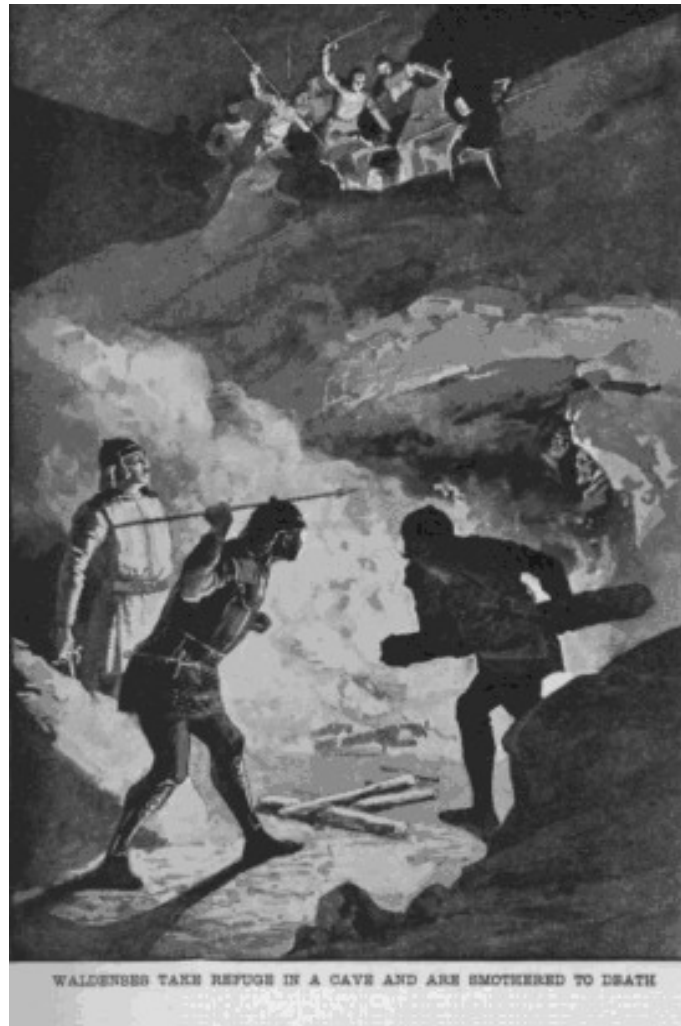
“As the faithful were thrust into prison, I'm sure they were comforted by remembering the life of John the Baptist. Jesus called him the greatest of all the prophets, yet John wasted away in a miserable dungeon and finally met a martyr's death. His faithful and obedient life didn't shelter him from an evil king's order and God did not interpose to set him free. Yet, God's grace strengthened John just as He strengthened the imprisoned Waldenses hundreds of years later.



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“Today we are going to read about some of the experiences the Waldenses had with Rome's army. Some of the stories are very sad, such as the one this picture depicts. Notice the fire at the

entrance to the cave and the soldiers with their raised swords standing on the roof of the cave. As we read the history of the Waldenses we sometimes see miraculous deliverances and other times there were heartbreaking defeats. However, I want you to remember that the Waldenses 'were still in heart and conscience free'. Having a pure and holy conscience gives peace and joy to their heart that no tribulation could erase.



<http://www.kamglobal.org/Martyrs/martyrs21.html>

“I hope we each will have a firmer resolve to be faithful to God so that like the Apostle Paul we can say, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' (Romans 8:35 – 39)

“Please make yourselves comfortable as we continue our story about the Waldenses of northern Italy,” Mr. Dell picked up his book and adjusted his glasses.

MY REFUGE AND MY FORTRESS: IN HIM WILL I TRUST

As the Waldensians became better organized their missionary efforts spread beyond their mountain ranges. However, things changed when Innocent III took the seat of papal power in 1179. Up until that time the mountain people had lived in relative peace and prosperity. Now this new pope determined to rid the world of the Waldensians' evangelistic spirit, their "heretical" Scriptures, and their insistence on freedom of conscience. Innocent III issued a bull condemning the pious valley people. For hundreds of years their valleys and villages were plundered and burned during repeated attacks by Inquisition-and monarch-led armies.

Such fierce persecutions destroyed most of the Waldenses' written history. However, during the mid 1600s one of their beloved leaders, Pastor Leger collected all the old manuscripts he could find and sent twenty-one volumes to the famous Protestant libraries of Cambridge and Geneva. In these havens of safety the important chronicles of the Church in the Wilderness were preserved for future generations. In this valuable collection were detailed the Waldensian doctrines, literature and history. Today, they are recognized as a valuable history both to the people of the valleys and to Protestant churches everywhere. Leger recorded not only his peoples' unimaginable trials but also the miraculous evidences of God's protection. The following stories relate some of the worst persecutions the brave Waldensian people experienced:

For hundreds of years the Waldenses felt relatively safe and protected during the winter months because of the frigid temperatures and deep snow blanketing the high passes leading into their sheltered valleys. However, that feeling of security evaporated on Christmas Day of 1400 when Borelli and his armed troops invaded their lands. Quickly the Waldensians fled to the mountains carrying their old, sick and young. As the slow and weak fell behind their faster and stronger countrymen, pursuing soldiers attacked and killed them. They were perhaps the fortunate ones. As morning dawned, frozen corpses - including between fifty to eighty infants and small children - were found littering the snow.

Yet these, and similar persecutions, did not destroy the faith of the brave valley Christians. J.A. Wylie tells us, "Rome saw that she was making no progress in the extermination of a heresy which had found a seat amid these hills, as firm as it was ancient. The numbers of the Waldenses were not thinned; their constancy was not shaken, they still refused to enter the Roman Church, and they met all the edicts and inquisitors, all the torturings and burnings of their great persecutors, with a resistance as unyielding as that offered by their rocks to the tempests of hail and snow which the whirlwinds of winter hurled against them" (*History of the Waldenses* 31).

It became obvious that the papacy needed a better plan to eradicate the Waldenses. In 1487 Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull calling for all Catholic men to join his battle against the heretics. They were promised forgiveness for all sins if they killed even one Waldensian; if someone signed a contract with a Waldensian they had papal approval to break that deal. As you may imagine, such promises lured many of the worst criminals into the papal army.

Plans were laid to invade the Waldensian valleys from two opposite directions. One army, under the command of General La Palu, would advance into the valley of Angrogna until it met the other papal army led by Legate Cataneo. When the gentle Waldensian people of Loyse saw the huge papal army enter through the pass into their valley, the elderly and young were

hastily placed in carts piled high with bundles of food and household goods. Voices were raised in psalm as they toiled up Mont Pelvoux toward safety.

Three thousand feet above the valley floor the fugitives entered an immense cave. In the inner hall the children, women and elderly set up housekeeping. They must have felt fairly safe, since it is said they had enough provisions to last at least two years. After tethering their sheep and cattle along the walls, the men barricaded the entrance to the cave and took turns keeping a lookout for danger. Any enemy foolish enough to follow them up the steep ascent could easily be thrown over the cliff to a sure death.

What they didn't know, however, was that General La Palu and some of his men had ascended the other side of the mountain. From the top of the Waldenses' cave, the captain lowered his men to the barricaded entrance. The Waldensian men seemed to "freeze" with fright. Rather than fight the attackers they retreated into the cave. General La Palu ordered his soldiers to gather all the wood they could find and build a mammoth fire at the mouth of the cave. Thick black smoke rolled into the cave and the trapped citizens had to choose between dying from smoke inhalation or fleeing the cave and dying by the sword.

"When the cavern was afterward examined," says Muston, "there were found in it four hundred infants, suffocated in their cradles, or in the arms of their dead mothers. Altogether there perished in this cavern more than three thousand Vaudois, including the entire population of the Val Loysé" (*History of the Waldenses* 37).

Simultaneously another assault took place on Piedmont - the stronghold of the Waldenses. The large, open valley afforded its population the most warning if enemies invaded their land. The Piedmontese immediately headed for the Alps when they heard that the pope's army was marching toward them. The papal captain, Cataneo, marched through the cities of La Torre, Villaro, and Bobbio leaving behind a swath of smoldering ruins, spoiled crops and heaps of dead bodies.

Cataneo reorganized his army into several attacking troops then sent 700 men to rid the Valley of Prali of heretics. After laboriously climbing to the summit, the soldiers stopped to rest only to be confronted by armed Waldensians. Cataneo's soldiers, exhausted from their grueling climb, were unprepared to battle courageous men who were fighting to protect their homes and families. Of the 700 soldiers, all were killed except one. That man escaped by hiding for several days in a large crack in the rocks. When hunger and cold forced him out, he threw himself on the mercy of the Waldenses. They kindly allowed him return and tell his captain the news of his troop's utter defeat.

While this attack was taking place on the Valley of Prali, Cataneo organized another unit to make a surprise attack on the Pra del Tor, which was the seat of the Waldensian government. Hearing of the attacks taking place around them, and knowing that Rome never changes, the peace-loving people of the valleys contemplated three choices. They could either go to mass as the Roman Church demanded, be butchered like cattle, or they must fight for their lives.

A decision was quickly made. Hastily the women, along with the children and the elderly, collected their things and began to climb the Pra at the head of the Valley of Angrogna. The men began to stockpile bows and construct shields of bark, which would offer protection from the pikes and swords of the enemy. Others erected barricades and organized themselves into combat groups.

As the enemy approached in a shower of arrows the Waldensians cried, "O God of our fathers, help us! O God, deliver us!" When the papal military leader, Black Mondovi, heard their prayers

he raised his visor and began shouting blasphemies. “Instantly an arrow from the bow of Pierre Revel, of Angrogna, entering between his eyes, transfixed his skull, and he fell on the earth a corpse. The fall of the daring leader disheartened the papal army. The soldiers began to fall back. They were chased down the slopes by the Vaudois who now descended upon them like one of their own mountain torrents. Having driven their invaders to the plain, cutting off not a few in their flight, they returned as the evening began to fall, to celebrate with songs, on the heights where they had won it, the victory with which it had pleased the God of their fathers to crown their arms” (*History of the Waldenses* 48).

Dr. J.A. Wylie describes Cataneo's reaction this way: “Cataneo burned with rage and shame at being defeated by these herdsmen.” He reassembled his men and planned a new strategy. To attack the Waldenses' hiding place the papal army had to travel a narrow pathway with a steep rocky wall on one side and a deep, dark chasm on the other. The path was so narrow that only two men could walk side-by-side. Steadily the Roman army advanced toward their apprehensive prey.

Suddenly “a small white cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand, unobserved by the [soldiers], but keenly watched by the [Waldensians], was seen to gather on the mountain’s summit, about the time the army would be entering the defile. That cloud grew rapidly bigger and blacker. It began to descend. It came rolling down the mountain’s side, wave on wave, like an ocean tumbling out of heaven – a sea of murky vapor. ... The Waldenses interpreted this as an interposition of Providence in their behalf. It had given them the power of repelling the invader. ... They tore up huge stones and rocks, and sent them thundering down into the ravine. The papal soldiers were crushed where they stood. Nor was this all. Some of the [Waldenses] boldly entered the chasm, sword in hand, and attacked them in front. Consternation seized the [papal host]. Panic impelled them to flee. ... They jostled one another; they threw each other down in the struggle; some were trodden to death, others were rolled over the precipice and crushed on the rocks below, or drowned in the torrent” (*History of the Waldenses* 50, 51). Thus ended the plotting and planning of Cataneo.

The pious Waldensian pastors played an important role during times of conflict. They turned the people's thoughts to their merciful Helper and encouraged the men with Bible promises and fervent intercessory prayer. The pastors also ensured that captured prisoners were treated in a humane and Christian manner. Wylie writes, “Their pastors restrained the victorious [Waldensians], having laid it down as a maxim at the beginning of the campaign that they would use with moderation and clemency whatever victories the 'God of battles' might be pleased to give them, and that they would spill no blood unless when absolutely necessary to prevent their own being shed” (*History of the Waldenses* 99).

One unique story recounts an invasion by Count La Trinita, the leader of the papal army, who attacked the Valley of Angrogna in 1560. The Waldensians received warning of the attack and called a public meeting. They ended their assembly by commemorating the Lord’s Supper together. Then, while the women, children and elderly climbed the mountain to safety, 1200 men prepared to defend their valley with slingshots and crossbows.

Fighting off their attackers, the Waldensian men slowly made their way up the mountain trail. As night fell the papal army could see silhouetted above them the Waldenses kneeling in prayer to the God of Battles. Jeers and scoffing from Rome's soldiers filled the air when suddenly, from another direction, a drum began to beat. It so happened that a young valley child had found a drum to play with, but to the papal army it sounded like a call to war. Hurriedly they rushed around attempting to organize. The Waldenses, seeing all the commotion, pursued the soldiers back down the mountain. In a panic the papal soldiers tossed aside their weapons and the grateful Waldensians collected them to use in future battles. At the

end of that day La Trinita was missing sixty-seven men while the valley people had lost only three.

On March 17, 1561 Count La Trinita reentered the Waldensian valleys. In spite of his best efforts he had not completed his assigned task and now he was ready to make another attempt. The people had just finished their morning worship when the alarm was sounded; the enemy was attacking from three different routes! Instantly Waldensian men rushed to meet them. The fighting was intense and many enemy soldiers lost their lives. We are told that La Trinita sat down and cried when he saw the heaps of dead soldiers which included some of his best captains.

Humiliated, but not admitting defeat, the Count again assembled another army and a few weeks later marched against the Pra del Tor. Six brave Waldensian men rushed to a pinnacle high above the entrance into the valley. Wylie tells the story this way: "The six Vaudois made their arrangements, and calmly waited till the enemy was near. The first two Vaudois, holding loaded muskets, knelt down. The second two stood erect, ready to fire over the heads of the first two. The third two undertook the loading of the weapons as they were discharged. The invaders came on. As the first two of the enemy turned the rock, they were shot down by the two foremost Vaudois. The next two of the attacking force fell in like manner by the shot of the Vaudois in the rear. The third rank of the enemy presented themselves only to be laid by the side of their comrades. In a few minutes a little heap of dead bodies blocked the pass, rendering impossible the advance of the accumulating file of the enemy in the chasm.

"Meanwhile, other Vaudois climbed the mountains that overhang the gorge in which the [papal army] was imprisoned. Tearing up the great stones with which the hillside was strewn, the Vaudois sent them rolling down upon the host. Unable to advance from the wall of dead in front, and unable to flee from the ever-accumulating masses behind, the soldiers were crushed in dozens by the falling rocks. Panic set in: and panic in such a position was dreadful. Wedged together on the narrow ledge, with a murderous rain of rocks falling on them, their struggle to escape was frightful. The jostled one another, and trod each other underfoot, while vast numbers fell over the precipice, and were dashed on the rocks or drowned in the torrent" (*History of the Waldenses* 100).

La Trinita could see the waters of the Angrogna turning red and boasted that they had at last won the victory. However, when his returning soldiers reported what had happened on the way to Pra del Tor we are told that La Trinita left the valleys never to return.

The Duke of Savoy, ruler of the Waldensian lands, issued a document which allowed the Waldensians to rebuilt their churches, hold public worship and follow the doctrines of their faith handed down through hundreds of years. For a time the bloodshed and tears were replaced with peace and praise.

"I've been thinking about our little talk on faith, class," Mr. Dell said as he selected a book from his bookshelf. "There is a passage from the book *Education* that I would like to read to you." Finding the paragraph Mr. Dell read: "Not until the providences of God are seen in the light of eternity shall we understand what we owe to the care and interposition of His angels. Celestial beings have taken an active part in the affairs of men. They have appeared in garments that shone as the lightning; they have come as men, in the garb of wayfarers. They have accepted the hospitalities of human homes; they have acted as guides to benighted travelers. They have thwarted the spoiler's purpose and turned aside the stroke of the destroyer.

“Though the rulers of this world know it not, yet often in their councils angels have been spokesmen. Human eyes have looked upon them. Human ears have listened to their appeals. In the council hall the court of justice, heavenly messengers have pleaded the cause of the persecuted and oppressed. They have defeated purposes and arrested evils that would have brought wrong and suffering to God's children. To the students in the heavenly school, all this will be unfolded.

“Every redeemed one will understand the ministry of angels in his own life. The angel who was his guardian from his earliest moment; the angel who watched his steps, and covered his head in the day of peril; the angel who was with him in the valley of the shadow of death, who marked his resting place, who was the first to greet him in the resurrection morning--what will it be to hold converse with him, and to learn the history of divine interposition in the individual life, of heavenly co-operation in every work for humanity!

“All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony.”

“I like that,” Emily said. “I hope I remember that everything that happens to me has a part in God's plan to save me for eternity. I want to learn to trust Him no matter what goes on.”

“Yeah,” agreed Jay. “It is kinda like what someone said in our Sabbath School. They used the analogy of baking a cake to illustrate the verse where Paul says that 'all things work together for good.' If we ate only the salt or the baking powder, we would think the cake was awful. But when all the ingredients are mixed together and baked we find the cake pretty good to eat. I guess we need to learn to take the 'good' with the 'bad' in life and know that everything works together to develop a Christlike character that is safe for Jesus take to heaven.”

“Well said,” Mr. Dell agreed.

B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1994) Chapters 15, 16

Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, ID, 1971) Chapter 4

J.A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Mountain View, California, 1977)