

# Standing for the Truth



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Dan. 7:23–25; Rev. 12:6, 14; Jude 3, 4; Rev. 2:10; Acts 5:28–32; Ps. 19:7–11; 1 John 5:11–13.*

**Memory Text:** “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (*John 3:14, 15, NKJV*).

The modern Turkish seacoast city of Izmir was once the biblical city of Smyrna, mentioned in the book of Revelation. This ancient city of approximately 100,000 inhabitants flourished in the late first and second centuries. It was a prosperous city, and it was fiercely loyal to Rome.

Once a year, all the citizens of Smyrna were commanded to burn incense to the Roman gods. Evidently, in the second century, Smyrna had a thriving Christian community, as well, and many were not going to comply. Polycarp, an early church leader, was martyred in Smyrna's public square, burned at the stake for refusing to betray his Lord by burning incense to the Roman gods. When asked one last time to disavow Christ, the old man replied, “Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How can I speak evil of my King who saved me?”

Throughout the centuries, men and women have been willing to experience martyrdom rather than give up their faith in Christ. Their sacrifice rekindles our courage. The story of their commitment to Christ renews our own commitment. This week we will look at some biblical principles that motivated the Waldenses and later Reformers, such as Huss and Jerome, to stay faithful to the Lord no matter what—even at the threat of death from the same power that killed Polycarp: Rome, but now in the papal phase.

\* Study this week's lesson, based on *The Great Controversy*, chapters 4–6, to prepare for Sabbath, April 27.

## Persecuted Yet Triumphant

**Read** Daniel 7:23–25 and Revelation 12:6, 14. What prophetic time periods are referred to in these passages?

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Whenever God's people remain faithful to Him, Satan is enraged. Persecution often follows. The prophet Daniel described a time, still future to him, when the medieval church would "make war against" and "persecute" God's people (*Dan. 7:21, 25, NKJV*). The prophet John described this same period as a time when God's church would be forced to flee into the wilderness, where she would be "nourished for a time and times and half a time" (*Rev. 12:14, NKJV*). Revelation 12:6 adds, "The woman [the church] fled into the wilderness where she has a place prepared by God" (*NKJV*). God's people were nourished in the wilderness. His Word strengthened and sustained them as the great controversy raged on during this long and dark period of papal domination.

God's people found a "place prepared" for them by God. In life's greatest challenges, God always prepares a place for His faithful followers. During the times of their greatest trial, His people have found refuge in His love and care. (*See Psalm 46.*)

The 1,260 days and the time, times, and half a time in Revelation 12:6, 14 are both referring to the same period (3½ times or years x 360 days per year = 1,260 days). Biblical prophecy is often written in symbols. In the prophetic portions of Daniel and Revelation, one prophetic day equals one literal year. We find this day-year principle in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

The day-year principle rests not on these two texts only, but on a broad scriptural foundation. William Shea, chronologist and Old Testament scholar, gives twenty-three lines of biblical evidence throughout the Old Testament for this principle. Bible interpreters have used it throughout the centuries.

The Visigoths, Vandals, and Ostrogoths were tribes that believed doctrines differently than Rome's official teaching. The 1,260 days began when the last of these barbarian tribes, the Ostrogoths, were driven out of Rome in A.D. 538. This period of spiritual darkness continued until A.D. 1798, when the Napoleon's general Berthier removed the pope from Rome. Countless Christians were martyred during this long period because they obeyed the Word of God. Even in death, they triumphed. In Christ they were free from the guilt and the dominion of sin, overcoming "through the blood of the Lamb." Christ's victory over Satan on the cross was their victory. Though they died, their death is only a rest until the return of Christ.

**How has fulfilled Bible prophecy strengthened your faith?**

## Light Vanquishes the Darkness

**Read** Jude 3, 4. What’s the warning here and how did it apply to the later Christian church?

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The book of Jude was written sometime before A.D. 65 to faithful Christians who were “sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ” (*Jude 1:1, NKJV*). These faithful believers were urged to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain men have crept in unnoticed, . . . who turn the grace of our God into lewdness” (*Jude 1:3, 4, NKJV*). This admonition meant even more to believers in the Middle Ages after pagan practices had flooded into the church and human traditions compromised the Word of God. For many centuries, people, such as the Waldenses, stood as champions for the truths of Scripture. They believed that Christ was their only mediator and the Bible their sole source of authority. “In every age there were witnesses for God—men who cherished faith in Christ as the only mediator between God and man, who held the Bible as the only rule of life, and hallowed the true Sabbath.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 61.

**Read** Revelation 2:10. What promise does God give those who are faithful to Him in the face of death itself?

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These words were written to the church at Smyrna. One of the city’s patron gods was Dionysius, the god of festivity and fertility. When the priests of Dionysius died, a crown was placed on their heads in their funeral procession. John contrasts this earthly crown placed on the head at death with the crown of life placed on the heads of those who are victorious over the forces of evil. The crown of life is presented to those who endured trials, difficulties, suffering, and death itself for Christ’s sake.

The crown of life inspires these faithful believers to endure death itself for Christ’s sake. The crown of life always motivates believers in challenging circumstances. It inspired the Waldenses through pain and persecution. They knew they would see Jesus one day and live with Him forever. The crown of life also speaks to us: we may go through trials now, but a crown of life awaits us as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.

**What encourages you in challenging times? What frightens you? What promises can you claim for those times?**

## Courage to Stand

**Compare** Acts 5:28–32, Ephesians 6:10–12, and Revelation 3:11.  
 What basic principle is found in these texts?

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One of the distinguishing characteristics of the Waldenses, and each one of the Reformers, was their absolute allegiance to God, their obedience to the authority of Scripture, and their commitment to the supremacy of Christ, not the papacy. Their minds were saturated with New Testament stories of faith and courage.

With Peter and the apostles they could say, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (*Acts 5:29, NKJV*). They grasped Paul’s admonition, “Be strong in the Lord and the power of His might” (*Eph. 6:10, NKJV*). They took seriously Jesus’ counsel, “Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown” (*Rev. 3:11, NKJV*). Rather than submit to the traditions of the Roman church, these stalwart men and women of faith had the courage to stand for the truths of God’s Word.

The Waldenses were one of the first groups to obtain the Bible in their own language. A moving account of their hand copying of the Bible written by Jean Leger, a Waldensian Bible copyist, contains firsthand information of their work including drawings. The Waldenses secretly copied the Scriptures in their mountain communities of northern Italy and southern France. Youth at an early age were instructed by their parents to memorize large portions of Scripture. Teams of Bible copyists worked together to laboriously copy the Bible. Many of these Waldense young adults traveled throughout Europe as merchants quietly sharing the truths of Scripture. Some enrolled in universities and, as the opportunity arose, shared portions of the Scriptures with their fellow students. Guided by the Holy Spirit, at the right moment when they sensed a receptivity on the part of some honest seeker, select portions of their precious Scripture passages were given away. Many paid for their fidelity and devotion with their lives. Although the Waldenses did not understand every Bible teaching clearly, they preserved the truth of God’s Word for centuries by sharing it with others.

“But the path of the just is like the shining sun, / That shines ever brighter unto the perfect day” (*Prov. 4:18, NKJV*). Solomon compares the path by which God leads His children to a sun that rises higher and higher. If God simply threw a cosmic switch and the sun shone instantly in all its brightness, it would blind us. After darkness engulfed the world for centuries, God raised up men and women, committed to His Word, who continued to search for more.

**How can we, reflecting the light of Christ, shine in our own community? Do we?**

## The Morning Star of the Reformation

**Read** Psalm 19:7–11, Psalm 119:140, Psalm 119:162, and Jeremiah 15:16. What similar attitudes did David and Jeremiah have toward the Word of God that were, really, the cornerstone of the Reformation?

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Each of the Reformers “rejoiced” in God’s Word. They “delighted” in doing God’s will. They “loved” His law. One of the most significant foundational truths of the Reformation was the joy that studying the Scriptures brought. Bible study was not a laborious task. It was not a legalistic exercise. It was not a rigid requirement but a delight. As they studied the Scriptures, they were transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

“The character of Wycliffe is a testimony to the educating, transforming power of the Holy Scriptures. It was the Bible that made him what he was. The effort to grasp the great truths of revelation imparts freshness and vigor to all the faculties. It expands the mind, sharpens the perceptions, and ripens the judgment. The study of the Bible will ennoble every thought, feeling, and aspiration as no other study can. It gives stability of purpose, patience, courage, and fortitude; it refines the character and sanctifies the soul. An earnest, reverent study of the Scriptures, bringing the mind of the student in direct contact with the infinite mind, would give to the world men of stronger and more active intellect, as well as of nobler principle, than has ever resulted from the ablest training that human philosophy affords.”—*The Great Controversy*, p. 94.

**Read** 2 Timothy 2:1–3. What counsel did the apostle Paul give to Timothy regarding sharing the Word of God?

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The truth of God’s Word and the joy of salvation in Christ so filled the hearts of the Reformers that they had to share it. John Wycliffe spent his life translating the Word of God into English for two reasons alone: the living Christ changed Him through the Word, and the love of Christ motivated him to share what he had learned with others.

Before Wycliffe, very little of the Bible existed in English. Though he died before Rome got to him, the papacy, undeterred, dug up his remains, burned them, and threw his ashes into a river. But just as those ashes were dispersed by the water, so God’s Word, the water of life, spread far and wide as a result of His work. Thus God used Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation.”

## Cheered by Hope

**Read** Hebrews 2:14, 15. How did believers in the Middle Ages experience the reality of the great controversy?

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What was it that cheered the faithful Waldenses during the horrible persecutions they faced? What gave Huss and Jerome, Tyndale, Latimer, and the martyrs of the Middle Ages courage to face the flames and the sword? Faith in the promises of God. They believed Christ's promise: "Because I live, you will live also" (*John 14:19*). They found His strength sufficient for life's greatest trials. They even found joy through fellowship with Christ in His sufferings. And their faithfulness was a powerful witness to the world.

They looked beyond what was to what will be. They knew that, through the resurrection of Christ, death was a defeated foe. For these courageous men and women, the stranglehold of death was broken. They clung to the promises of God's Word and came away victorious.

**Read** John 5:24, John 11:25, 26, and 1 John 5:11–13. What assurances do these promises give you personally? How do they help us in the trials of life?

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John Huss would not falter in the face of imprisonment, injustice, and death itself. He languished in prison for months. The cold, damp conditions brought on a fever that nearly ended his life. Nevertheless, "the grace of God sustained him. During the weeks of suffering that passed before his final sentence, heaven's peace filled his soul. 'I write this letter,' he said to a friend, 'in my prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death tomorrow. . . . When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we shall again meet in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself toward me, how effectually He has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials.'—Bonnechose, vol. 2, p. 67. In the gloom of his dungeon he foresaw the triumph of the true faith."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 107, 108.

The apostle Paul's admonition speaks to us with increasing relevance today. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful" (*Heb. 10:23, NKJV*). As the promises of God sustained His people in ages past, so they sustain us today.

**What might it mean to lose everything for Christ? What, in the end, do you really lose? (See Mark 8:36.) What lessons can we learn from the Waldenses and the Reformers that can sustain us in earth's final conflict?**

**Further Thought:** “God permitted great light to shine upon the minds of these chosen men, revealing to them many of the errors of Rome; but they did not receive all the light that was to be given to the world. Through these, His servants, God was leading the people out of the darkness of Romanism; but there were many and great obstacles for them to meet, and He led them on, step by step, as they could bear it. They were not prepared to receive all the light at once. Like the full glory of the noontide sun to those who have long dwelt in darkness, it would, if presented, have caused them to turn away. Therefore, He revealed it to the leaders little by little, as it could be received by the people. From century to century, other faithful workers were to follow, to lead the people on still further in the path of reform.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 103.

“In another letter, to a priest who had become a disciple of the gospel, Huss spoke with deep humility of his own errors, accusing himself ‘of having felt pleasure in wearing rich apparel and of having wasted hours in frivolous occupations.’ He then added these touching admonitions: ‘May the glory of God and the salvation of souls occupy thy mind, and not the possession of benefices and estates. Beware of adorning thy house more than thy soul; and, above all, give thy care to the spiritual edifice. Be pious and humble with the poor, and consume not thy substance in feasting. Shouldst thou not amend thy life and refrain from superfluities, I fear that thou wilt be severely chastened, as I am myself.’ ”—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 105, 106.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1 What is “progressive light”? Why does God reveal truth gradually? How do these principles apply to God’s church today?
- 2 How do new discoveries of truth relate to previous truths that God’s people have understood? Why must new light never contradict old light?
- 3 No matter where you live, your culture is going to promote values, ideas, and moral codes that in some way conflict with what the Bible teaches. After identifying these areas of conflict, how do you see yourself and us, as a church, dealing with these challenges? How do we remain good citizens while at the same time not succumbing to whatever warped values our culture proclaims?
- 4 How does John Huss’s letter impact your thinking today? What impresses you about this letter?

## Tale of Two Neighbors

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

Mussa's religion taught that it is wrong to raise pigs for sale. But Mussa worked as a pig farmer.

Nicolonaga's religion taught that it is wrong to divorce for any reason except sexual immorality. But Nicolonaga married three times and, on top of that, had three common-law wives at different times.

The two men, who were neighbors, lived lives that were far from their professed religious beliefs. But God had a plan for them in Mozambique.

One day, one of Mussa's pigs entered Nicolonaga's vegetable garden and caused considerable damage.

Nicolonaga was furious and demanded a fistfight. He won the brawl, and Mussa limped away bloodied and battered. But Mussa did not intend to give up. He vowed revenge through witchcraft. "You have thirty days to prepare for your death," he told Nicolonaga.

The next day, Nicolonaga woke up seriously ill. He spoke about Mussa's threat to his friends from the Seventh-day Adventist church, where he had once worshipped.

As Nicolonaga's condition steadily deteriorated, he grew worried. After 15 days, he asked church members to pray for him, and the pastor organized a prayer team to visit his house.

But Nicolonaga did not get better. Another week passed, and his options seemed few.

With the clock ticking down on Mussa's 30-day deadline, the pastor called for a night of fasting and prayer for Nicolonaga.

Early the next morning, Mussa knocked on the door of the pastor's house. He told a fantastic story about how his gods had fought with Nicolonaga's God, and Nicolonaga's God had won. He said he could no longer take Nicolonaga's life. He wanted to become a Christian.

"I want to worship Nicolonaga's God," he said.

Nicolonaga recovered from his illness, and both he and Mussa joined an Adventist baptismal class. Both gave their hearts to Jesus in baptism. Today, both are powerful forces for good in their region of Mozambique.

"God is powerful, and He answers the prayers of those who seek Him in faith," said Nelson A. Quenesse, the pastor.

After all, he said, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (*Heb. 11:6, NKJV*).

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*Thank you for your Sabbath School mission offerings that help spread the gospel in Mozambique and around the world.*