

YOUTH



LEVEL 9

BIBLE

LESSONS



LESSON 10



The History of God's Church—Part 2

THE HISTORY OF GOD'S CHURCH PART 2

Polycarp was now the principal leader of the Church of God. He was personally trained by the last surviving apostle, John, who died about A.D. 100. This marked the end of the apostolic period and the beginning of a new phase in the history of the Church.

We learned in our last lesson that the Work of God's Church would be done in various stages throughout history. In this lesson, we will continue our study of the true Church of God for the next 1,000 years.

SMYRNA TAKES THE LEAD

"And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write . . . I know thy works, and tribulation, *and poverty*, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan" (Revelation 2:8-9).

Christ characterized this period in the history of His Church as a poor people in the eyes of the world. But He also stated that they were rich.

As you may remember from our last lesson, the early Church of the apostles was sometimes referred to as the sect of the Nazarenes. Now, true Christians became known as *Ebionites*, which simply means "paupers" or "poor, destitute." It is also important to keep in mind that not all Ebionites were part of the true Church of God. There were other groups who were called Ebionites.

ABOUT OUR COVER . . .

An outdoor theater in the city of Pergamos (modern Bergama).

Courtesy Ministry of Tourism and Information/Turkey

How were they rich?

They were rich spiritually.

Christ continued to guide and lead His true Church in this age. Smyrna continued to be headquarters for Greek Christians as Pella had been for Jewish Christians after the fall of Jerusalem. Later, Jewish Christians spread themselves into small villages near Damascus.

Would this period of the Church also suffer persecution, along with all others who called themselves Christians?

The historian Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*, VIII, 15, 16) records that a severe ten-year persecution, inaugurated by Diocletian, took place in A.D. 303-313. Using the day-for-a-year principle in prophecy, we see that this was prophesied by Jesus Christ.

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and *ye shall have tribulation ten days*: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

THE CONTROVERSY OVER PASSOVER

Very early in the history of the Church of God there arose a totally different system of "Christianity." The headquarters of this system was established at Rome. This church, which called itself "Christian," developed a great following and influence. And, by A.D. 150, the bishop at Rome had authority at least equal to Polycarp in Asia Minor.

In order to accommodate pagan converts, the Roman church accepted Sunday as a day of

worship. The Sabbath, however, continued to be observed in the Churches of God in Asia Minor. The Sabbath was a day for worship services in the West, but it was also a day of work rather than a day of rest as commanded by God.

The Roman church reasoned that Christ was resurrected from the dead on Sunday morning, which justified calling Sunday “the Lord’s Day.” It was a day for rest and worship in the Roman world.

Of course, Christ was not resurrected from the dead on Sunday. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb early Sunday morning, Jesus was already gone. He had been resurrected on Saturday before sunset—staying exactly three days and three nights in the tomb. So there was no justification at all for changing the Saturday Sabbath to Sunday (Matthew 12:40; 28:1, 6).

For more information on this subject, write for the free booklet *The Resurrection Was Not on Sunday* by Herbert W. Armstrong.

Another significant change had been made by the Roman church regarding the observance of Passover. Sometime during the early part of the second century, the Roman church set aside Sunday as a Christian festival.

About this same time, animosity toward the Jews grew in intensity. Jews were blamed for the death of Christ. So it became common to change anything which had the appearance of being Jewish. As a result, the “Jewish” Passover was generally not observed in Rome and in Alexandria, Egypt.

However, Polycarp and most of the Churches of God in Asia Minor continued to observe God’s Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan (Abib), just as Christ had done. This struggle over Passover and Easter came to be called the *Quartodeciman Controversy*. The name comes from the Latin word for “fourteenth.”

In A.D. 154, Polycarp went to Rome to discuss this important problem with Anicetus, the bishop at Rome. Little is known of the meeting except that neither was able to per-

suade the other. So the Roman church firmly established a Sunday communion and the Churches of God in Asia Minor continued to observe the Passover once every year on the fourteenth of Nisan.

THE DEATH OF POLYCARP

Much of the knowledge we have of this time comes from the historian Irenaeus. From him we learn that Polycarp remembered the apostles’ teachings and followed them with strict adherence. Irenaeus records an occasion when Polycarp apparently met Marcion, one of the great heretics of the early Church of God. Marcion asked Polycarp, “Know you us?” To which Polycarp replied, “I know you are the firstborn of Satan.”

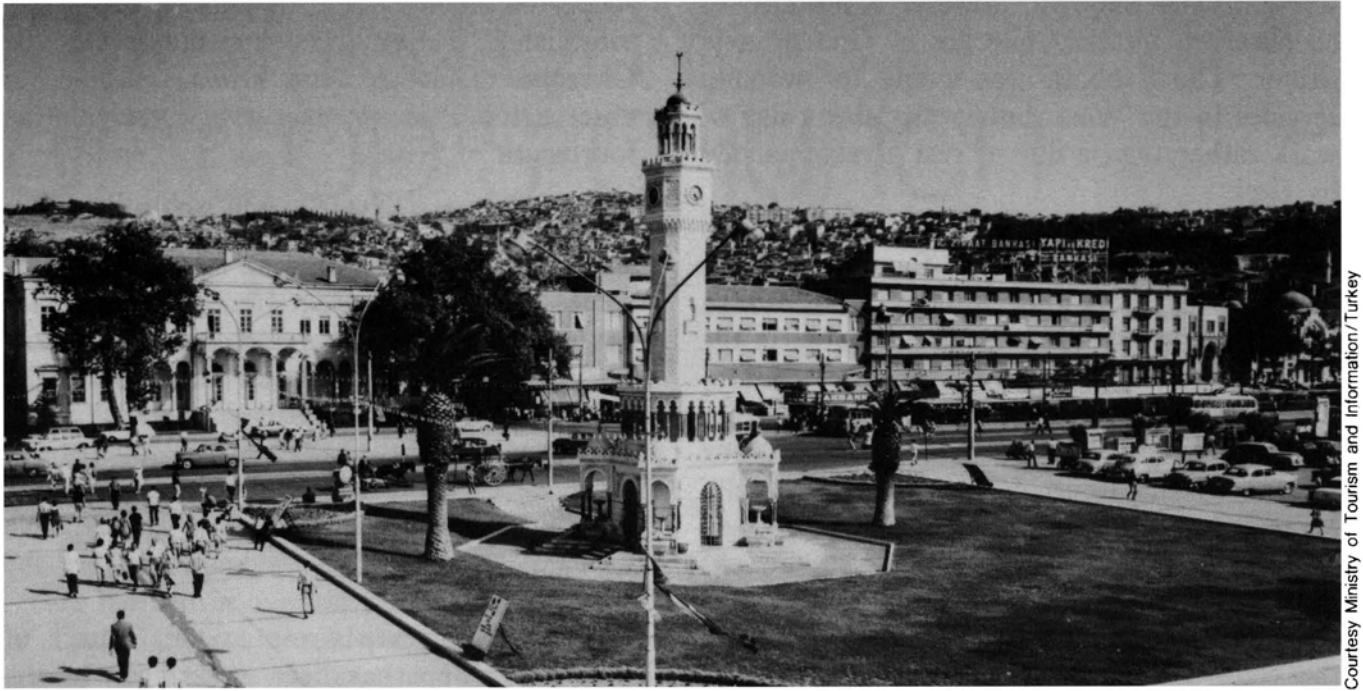
A letter Polycarp wrote to the Church of God in Philippi has been preserved. In the letter Polycarp exhorted, “Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning.”

After returning from Rome, Polycarp resided in the city of Smyrna in Asia Minor. The next year he was arrested by city officials and told to renounce his Christian religion. He would not. When told to revile Christ, he said, “Fourscore and six years have I been His [Christ’s] servant, and He hath done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King who saved me?”

He was stabbed and burned at the stake by an angry mob. This took place in A.D. 155.

During Polycarp’s ministry he had trained a minister in Asia Minor. His name was Polycrates. As a very young boy he may have known the Apostle John.

Polycrates continued to faithfully observe the Passover on the fourteenth of Nisan. As we have seen, the Roman church observed Sunday. There is an account of Polycrates writing a letter to Victor, bishop of Rome. In the letter, Polycrates said, “We, therefore, observe the genuine day; neither adding thereto nor taking therefrom.”



General view of Konak Square in the city of Smyrna.

Courtesy Ministry of Tourism and Information/Turkey

Unfortunately, there is little written material available from the late part of the second century and for most of the third. Consequently, not much is known about the life of Polycrates.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE BECOMES "CHRISTIAN"

A very important event took place in the fourth century—a pivotal event in history. In A.D. 313, Constantine became undisputed emperor of the Roman Empire.

Throughout most of the third century, the true Church of God, as well as all who called themselves Christians, had been persecuted by the Roman government. Sometimes that persecution was severe. The prophecy to the Smyrna Church of God indicated they would have many trials.

During the Roman persecution, Constantine's father, an army officer, protected Christians. His mother, Hellena, developed a great respect for Christians as well.

Remember that at this time, there were many groups of "Christians," who were not part of the original, true Church of God. The

majority of the true Church of God was in Asia Minor and the East.

In A.D. 313, while leading his army at the battle of Milvian Bridge, Constantine allegedly saw a vision. In the sky he saw a flaming cross and above it the words *In Hoc Signo Vinces* ("In this sign, conquer!"). He was victorious in the battle.

As a result of that vision, he became very closely involved with the many Christian groups. Although he was not a baptized "Christian" for many more years, his impact on Christianity was great.

Emperor Constantine issued a religious-freedom proclamation in A.D. 313. From Milan in Italy, he proclaimed that Christians had equal rights in the empire and that confiscated Christian properties had to be returned. Also, at that same time, the Roman church became the dominant religious influence in the empire.

After his acceptance of Christianity, Constantine found the Roman church in a state of confusion. Some were keeping Easter, some Passover. Others were observing Sunday,

and still others, the Sabbath. To solve the confusion he called a church council in the city of Nicea in Asia Minor. It was the first of many ecumenical (general) councils that would be held over the centuries.

THE COUNCIL OF NICEA

The Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 was of major importance in the history of the Roman church. A conclave of bishops gathered in meetings, with Constantine personally presiding over the proceedings.

Two main issues confronted the council. One controversy among the bishops arose because of a priest in Alexandria named Arius. He believed Christ had not existed prior to His human birth and was therefore a creation of God. His doctrine is called Arianism. The majority of bishops could not accept this and formulated a decree called the Nicene Creed. It is still recited by Roman Catholics as well as several Protestant groups today.

Another subject of the Nicene Council was to be of even greater import to God's true Church. It was the subject of Passover, which had been a contention for nearly 200 years.

After considerable deliberation, the majority agreed that the Passover should be observed as a memorial of the Lord's resurrection, rather than His death. It was to be on the first Sunday after the full moon following the beginning of spring. Continuing to observe the Passover on the fourteenth of the first month was called "Judaizing" and was forbidden.

An edict from the council stated that "Anyone who resists the decision of Nicea will incur the imperial displeasure and be sent into banishment because he has injured the unity of the Church."

Thus the church had the backing of the Roman government to persecute any who would practice any other way than that decreed by the Roman church.

SUNDAY AS A DAY OF WORSHIP

In the fourth century, Sunday worship became more solidified. In the intervening cen-

turies the Roman church had accepted the false teaching that Jesus had been crucified on a Friday and resurrected on a Sunday morning.

Constantine strongly backed Sunday worship. In A.D. 321, he issued an edict forbidding work on "the venerable day of the sun" (Sunday), thus substituting Sunday for the seventh-day Sabbath.

One of the earliest supporters of the Roman church, Justin Martyr, also justified Sunday worship. "But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness. . . ." They used the day God began His work—not the day on which He rested and instructed mankind to observe as a Sabbath.

Another supporter of the Roman church, Tertullian, late in the second century called Sunday "a day of festivity."

Still, both Saturday and Sunday continued to be observed side by side in the various churches of this world's Christianity for hundreds of years. However, regular work was required on Saturday—Sunday was the day of rest. Sunday was never consecrated as a Sabbath. It was a day of games and festivity in addition to worship services. Hence, today, most of the professing Christian world does not really rest on Sunday.

Also in the fourth century, another council was convened in the city of Laodicea. Official doctrine was established in two important areas. The 29th canon (official church law) forbade working on Sunday. The 37th and 38th canons did not allow the observance of God's annual holy days. The official Christianity of the Roman Empire cast them all out, stating they were unacceptable Jewish customs. Interestingly, the 16th canon required the Gospels to be read aloud on the Sabbath (Saturday).

Another supporter of the official church of the Roman Empire, Augustine, was one of the most influential. He was instrumental in the development of another very important—but false—doctrine. He preached a concept called

“The City of God.” He concluded that the Roman church was the Kingdom of God on earth.

This paved the way for the church to participate in civil government and to use any means possible to convert people to its religion. This concept would later justify wars in the name of religion. The church had become the state.

For the astounding truth about the Kingdom of God, write for the free booklet *Just What Do You Mean . . . Kingdom of God?*

THE FALL OF ROME

During the fifth century, the Roman Empire became weak and decadent. In A.D. 476, invading armies defeated the once great empire. The tribes from the east—Vandals and Heruli (and later the Ostrogoths)—divided up the Roman territories.

It appeared as though the Roman Empire had ended.

But the empire had not ended. God had foretold the fall of Rome and of its impending revival: “And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed” (Revelation 13:3).

In A.D. 554, the eastern Roman emperor, Justinian, with a blessing from the bishop at Rome, restored the territories of the empire. Now the official church of the Empire became more influential and powerful than ever before.

The Bible records this event in the analogy of a fallen woman riding a scarlet-colored beast. In Bible symbolism, a woman represents a church—in the case of a fallen woman, a false church (Revelation 17:3-4).

The church now began to direct the Roman government. For the next 1,260 years—from A.D. 554 to 1814—the Roman church held sway over the governments of Europe. Then, in 1814, with the defeat of Napoleon Bonaparte, the dominion of the Roman Christianity lessened.

If you would like to know more, write for the free booklet *Who or What Is the Prophetic Beast?* by Herbert W. Armstrong.

THE HISTORY OF GOD'S CHURCH

DIRECTIONS

Using the list of countries, provinces, districts, cities and seas below, write the correct name in the proper place on the map. You may use an atlas if you need help.

COUNTRIES/PROVINCES/ DISTRICTS

Italy	Mananali
France	Judea
Armenia	Asia Minor
Spain	(Turkey)
Bulgaria	

CITIES

Smyrna	Rome
Milan	Pergamos
Pella	Constantinople
Lyons	Thyatira

SEAS

Black Sea	Caspian Sea
Aegean Sea	Mediterranean
Red Sea	Sea

Do You Remember?

1. Who was the leader of the Church of God who lived in Smyrna? _____.
2. True Christians in the second and third centuries were called _____. The name means _____.
3. It was prophesied in a letter to Christians in Smyrna that Christians would have severe persecution for ____ years.

THE WORK OF GOD'S CHURCH IN EUROPE



4. The Quartodeciman Controversy was about which holy day? _____.
5. The Roman church decided to observe _____ instead of the Sabbath as a day of worship.
6. True Christians observed the Passover on the _____.
7. Who was the young minister trained by Polycarp? _____.
8. What emperor proclaimed religious freedom for Christians in the Roman Empire?

9. _____.
What was the first church council of the official church of the Roman Empire? _____.
When? _____.
10. The Roman Empire was defeated in A.D. _____.
It was later revived in A.D. _____ by _____.

THE LETTER TO PERGAMOS

Let's briefly review what happened to the true Church of God after the fall of Jerusalem

in A.D. 70. Those who heeded Christ's warning to flee Jerusalem when it was surrounded by armies settled in Pella on the east side of the Jordan river.

Late in the first century, we know the Apostle John lived in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). This was also where Polycarp and Polycrates carried on Christ's work from the city of Smyrna.

After the time of Emperor Constantine, when the official church gained supremacy, God's people were persecuted. They lived mostly in small villages and cities. Later, larger numbers lived in northeastern Asia Minor in the region of Armenia—between the Black and Caspian Seas.

It was in this area that the next age of the Church of God would begin. This was foretold in the letter to the Church in Pergamos.

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write . . . I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith” (Revelation 2:12-13).

True Christians of this period, foretold in the letter to the Christians at Pergamos, were often referred to as *Paulicians*. The name probably comes from the fact they followed the teachings of the Apostle Paul. But there are several other theories of their origin and the reason for their name.

One of the principal leaders of the Paulicians in the mid to late 600s A.D. was a man named Constantine of Mananali. He was a wealthy merchant in the city of Mananali, Armenia.

He had been given a part of the New Testament as a gift. As he read it, he found it quite different from the traditions of the great false church. Inspired by what he was learning, he began to preach the truth. He soon had a large following of people.

The Roman government, under sway of a false Christianity, investigated this “heretic.” They sent a man named Simeon to destroy this movement started by Constantine. He was so cruel that he demanded members of God's

Church to stone Constantine of Mananali to death. This took place in the late 600s A.D.

This event was prophesied to happen by the Apostle John: “Even in those days wherein *Antipas was my faithful martyr*, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth” (Revelation 2:13). The name Antipas may be translated to mean “against the papa [pope].” This was certainly true of Constantine of Mananali.

Apparently, Simeon was so moved by the sincerity and zeal of the Paulicians, and by the bravery of Constantine at his death, that he was converted. He later became an important leader in God's true Church.

The Roman government again intervened. This time Simeon was apparently reported to the government by the same man who had betrayed Constantine of Mananali. Simeon was also martyred.

During the mid 800s A.D., the Paulicians suffered terrible persecution. Empress Theodora had many thousands of Paulicians martyred in Armenia. It is important to note here that by about A.D. 700, the majority of the true Church of God had moved. And, after about A.D. 800, most Paulicians who were left were no longer the true Church of God.

THE KEY OF TRUTH

In the 1800s, a British scholar named F. C. Conybeare found an important manuscript in Armenia. It was a selection of writings by the Paulicians from the 800s A.D.

This important document is one of the very few pieces of written material we have from these groups. Most of what we know about anyone who was not part of the official church is from those who persecuted true Christians as heretics. Reading their slanted sources makes it difficult to find God's true Church during these centuries.

Conybeare called his amazing find *The Key of Truth*. Through this piece of literature we can put together a somewhat sketchy story of what God's people might have been like in those tumultuous times.

Notice some of the key doctrines of the Paulicians recorded in *The Key of Truth*. They believed that Mary had other children after the birth of Jesus and that neither she nor the saints can intercede for us. They also believed that the cross was an object of idolatry and should not be used.

In addition, they believed that all the apostles were given the keys of the Kingdom of God—not just the Apostle Peter. Also, a person could not be baptized until old enough to accept the responsibility. The Church of God was not a building, but consisted of the baptized members. And they did not accept the doctrine of the Trinity (*The Key of Truth*, edited and translated by F. C. Conybeare, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1898, pps. 33-40).

Finally, persecution drove the Paulicians out of Armenia. They began to migrate into what is now Bulgaria in Eastern Europe. The Bulgarian converts became known as *Bogomils*, a name applied to various people all of whom were labeled “heretics” by official Christianity.

Also at this time, a division developed between the Western church at Rome and the Eastern church at Constantinople (Byzantium). In 1054 the Eastern Orthodox church broke completely away from the Roman Catholic church. They have remained separate to this day.

Do You Remember?

1. What was the third period of the Church of God? _____.
2. The true Christians in the third stage of God’s Church were called _____. Later, after transplanting to Bulgaria, they were called _____.
3. The principal leader in the Pergamos period was a man named _____.
4. A man named F. C. Conybeare found a Paulician document in _____ in the 1800s that he called the _____.
5. What important event in church history took place in 1054? _____.

THYATIRA PERIOD BEGINS

When Charlemagne became emperor in A.D. 800, he granted great favor to the Roman church. In turn he was crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire by the Pope at Rome. This empire lasted in various forms for more than 1,000 years—finally diminishing with the defeat of Napoleon in the early 1800s.

During the period of time from about A.D. 800 to 1500, the papacy wielded tremendous power. But power was corrupted. Since the bishops were more affluent, it was not uncommon at this time to find men of wealth buying positions in the church. This practice is called *simony*—a word which is derived from Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8).

This corruption by many led people to attempt reform in the official church. Some broke away from the church. They abhorred the corruption they saw and spoke openly against it.

Many of you may have read or heard about the Crusades of the Middle Ages. The major effort of the Crusades was to free the Holy Land (Palestine) from the Mohammedans, who had taken it in the 600s.

But what many do not realize is that those same crusaders often killed hundreds of thousands of people in Europe before they even reached the Holy Land. In fact, the very first crusade, which lasted from 1095-1099 (there were seven crusades, lasting until 1272), greatly persecuted the true Church of God. Hundreds were murdered simply because they were not part of the official church. Later crusades also persecuted the true Church of God.

THE ALBIGENSES AND PETROBRUSIANS

Let’s again review the history of the true Church. God’s true Church was found in Bulgaria at this time. The most common name for them was *Bogomils*. The name means “friend of God.”

Like the Paulicians before them, they included those who believed they were the true successors of the apostolic Church. They also rejected many of the doctrines of false Christianity.

After the decline of the true Church in this period, we begin another new age of the Church of God—Thyatira.

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write . . . I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; *and the last to be more than the first*” (Revelation 2:18-19).

Late in the 11th century an influential group appeared in the south of France. They were called *Albigenses*. The name comes from the city of Albi where many of them lived. Their teacher was a man named Peter of Bruys.

Peter of Bruys was appalled by the degradation of the official church. Many followed his teachings and later became known as *Petrobrusians*.

Peter rejected the authority of the false church and abhorred infant baptism, believing only mature adults who could profess faith should be baptized. He rejected the worship of crosses since Christ died on a cross. He denied the doctrine of transubstantiation and he was opposed to pretentious church buildings.

Peter of Bruys was later killed by an infuriated crowd that burned him at the stake.

After the death of Peter, two other Church leaders appeared. One was Arnold of Brescia. Arnold preached using the Bible as his authority and stood for many of the principles Peter of Bruys believed. His followers were known as *Arnoldists*. But again, he was arrested by persecutors, hanged, his body burned and his ashes thrown into the Tiber River near Rome.

A more direct successor to Peter of Bruys was a man named Henri (Henry) of Laussane. He was an eloquent orator. He preached powerfully against the corruption of the priests and argued against the doctrine that priests could

not marry. His followers were called *Henricians*.

Among these peoples, the Albigenses, Petrobrusians, Arnoldists and Henricians were the small and persecuted few who made up the true Church of God in the 11th and 12th centuries.

We can note that the Church of God was dispersed through this period. But we will also see that the Work of God's Church in the Thyatira period was not over. Its last works were to be greater than the first.

THE WALDENSIANS

After the death of Henri of Laussane, the Church of God in the Thyatira period lacked strong leadership. Consequently they were unable to thrive as a unified Church.

Then God called a new leader to direct His Church in the latter part of the 12th century. His name was Peter Waldo. He was a wealthy merchant in the city of Lyons, France. He was married and had two daughters. They were part of the official church.

An event took place which totally changed Peter Waldo's life. It was the death of his close friend, which caused him to seriously consider the meaning of life.



The Angrogna Valley in the Cottian Alps. It was in this area that the latter part of the Thyatira stage of God's Church was headquartered.

YES Photo

Waldo gave the bulk of his money to the poor and made proper provisions for his wife and family. With the remainder of his money, he had portions of the Bible translated into the language of the people. Prior to this the Bible was written in the original Hebrew and Greek with translations only into Latin. Of course, no one but the learned could read it.

Peter Waldo then began to preach God's way of life. His followers were often called the "poor men of Lyons" and *Waldenses*. Some scholars feel the name Waldenses came from the name of Peter Waldo. Others trace its origin back to a time even before Peter Waldo. Because these Christians resided in the forests of Europe, they may have been named for the German word for forest, *wald*.

Waldo's preaching had a terrific impact. The Church of God began to spread throughout various areas of Europe. Just as those before them, the Waldenses were opposed to papal corruption, the doctrine of transubstantiation, mass, pagan festivals being made Christian, prayers for the dead and many other traditional false doctrines.

The Waldenses did not believe in taking oaths, such as in a court of law. They did believe they were the true followers of the apostolic Church founded by Christ. They believed the official church was the fallen woman of the book of Revelation. Some among them kept the Sabbath on the seventh day. There is also an indication that some of them may have observed the annual holy days.

In 1184 Pope Lucius III called them "heretics" and pronounced them "anathema"—cut off from Christ.

Also as a result of the Albigenses and the Waldenses, Pope Innocent III instituted trials against hundreds of thousands of "heretics" who were later tortured and murdered.

In the course of time, many Waldenses weakened and no longer considered themselves a part of God's true Church. Later, many Waldenses reentered the official church, while

others were absorbed into the movements of the Protestant Reformation. But in Italy today, there are still lineal descendants of the Waldenses of the Middle Ages, although not members of the true Church of God.

In our next lesson we will learn how God continued to direct and preserve His small flock—the Church of God. We will also learn how the true Church of God developed in Britain and later in America.

Do You Remember?

1. The fourth age of God's Church was the _____.
2. In the early part of the Thyatira period, God called a man named _____ who preached in the south of _____. His followers were often called _____ and _____.
3. The practice of buying a position in the church is called _____.
4. The first crusade lasted from _____ to _____.
5. How many crusades were there? _____.
6. The direct successor of Peter of Bruys was _____. His followers were called _____.
7. What important prophecy would characterize the Work of God's Church in the Thyatira period? (Revelation 2:19) _____.
8. _____ was a wealthy merchant in the city of Lyons, France.
9. The followers of Peter Waldo were called _____ or _____.
10. Pope Innocent III instituted one of the great atrocities of history, the _____.
11. Are there still Waldenses in the world today? _____. Are they still the true Church of God? _____.

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PASTOR GENERAL: JOSEPH W. TKACH

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BIBLE MEMORY

Chapter Recognition

I Corinthians 15/Resurrection Chapter

Hebrews 11/Faith Chapter

Revelation 2-3/Church Eras

Revelation 12/True Church

Revelation 17/False Church

Revelation 19/Christ's Second Coming

Revelation 21/New Heaven

and New Earth

**CHURCH ERAS
MAZE**

Follow the maze from **START**
to **END**. Then decode the
message hidden in the
puzzle to learn your next
assignment.

