

• Part 1 -- Baptist History

• Lesson 3 -- 476-1500 A.D.

• The Dark Ages: Domination of Religion, Politics, and Culture by a State Church



A. What Were the Dark Ages? The Dark Ages, also called the Middle Ages, was a thousand-year period characterized by both cultural and religious darkness.

- **Cultural Darkness.** The original use of the term was by the classical scholar Petrarch in the 1330s. He considered the Greek and Roman era as the flowering of civilization, while the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire were seen as culturally stagnant.
- **Religious Darkness.** The historian Edward Gibbon, author of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, described the thousand-year reign of the Roman Catholic Church as priest-ridden, superstitious, dark times -- the Dark Ages.

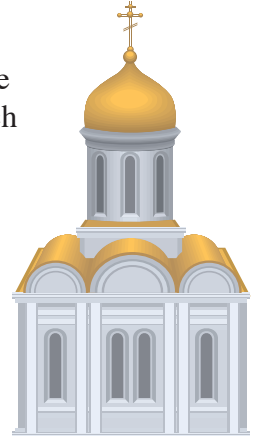
B. The Early Dark Ages (476-1000 A.D.)

1. Major Historical Developments

- a. Collapse of the Roman Empire.** Without a doubt, the collapse of the Roman Empire was the chief factor for the onset of the Dark Ages. Long before the Goths, the Huns, and the Vandals overthrew the Roman Empire, Rome was destroyed within by its own materialism and immorality. With its political will and armies slowly decaying, Rome was no match for the rising tide of so-called barbarians. The only part of the old Roman Empire which survived after 476 A.D. was the Eastern Empire headquartered in Constantinople.

b. **Dominance of the Roman Catholic Church.** As the political, economic, and cultural systems of Rome were collapsing, the single surviving Roman institution was the Roman Catholic Church, which assumed greater and greater political power.

- Politicians controlled the church in order to maintain political control.
- Literacy and education had little place in a church hierarchy that maintained power through the ignorance and superstition of the laity.
- The paganization of the church, combined with the prevalence of man's traditions over God's Word, led to corrupt religious practices and the persecution of those believers who refused to participate in the long slide into heresy.



c. **The Rise of Islam.** In the religious vacuum of the Dark Ages, there arose a new religion, Islam, founded in 610 A.D. by a man named Mohammed, who was greatly influenced early in life by both Jews and Christians, whom he referred to as People of the Book. Although he incorporated much of the Bible into his teachings, Mohammed dethroned Jesus as God, instead elevating his tribal moon god Al-ilah to the stature of Almighty God.

Islam was propagated by the sword, conquering most of the Middle East, Egypt, North Africa, and Spain by 711 A.D. In one of the most decisive battles in world history, Charles Martel, a Frankish general and political leader, defeated the Islamic Moors in the Battle of Tours in 732 A.D., halting the spread of Islam in Europe. *Application: In our day, instead of conquering Europe by the sword, Islam is conquering a decadent, zero population growth Europe by immigration.*

2. **Contending for the Faith.** By the time of the first pope, Leo I (440-461 A.D.), and Gregory I (590-604 A.D.), the Roman Catholic Church consolidated its religious and political power, establishing a wide variety of unBiblical beliefs and practices based upon political considerations and pagan practices and traditions, including the following:

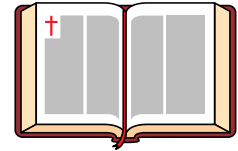
- **Infant baptism**, which became official doctrine in 416 A.D., developed into a tremendous tool to control the population.
- **Exaltation of Mary, the Mother of God.** This practice, borrowed from paganism, eventually led to other heresies concerning Mary.
- **Purgatory**, an unBiblical doctrine that God sentences dead believers in a holding pen until their sins are fully paid for, was another tremendous tool to control the population. This hellish doctrine led to other false doctrines such as **prayers for the dead** and **indulgences**.
- **Bible reading was prohibited**, since only clergy could interpret the Scriptures.
- **Confession**, the practice of confessing sin to your priest, was a pagan practice adopted by the church to further control the population.

- **Transubstantiation**, the belief that the bread and juice of the Lord's Supper becomes the literal body and blood of Jesus, was a cannibalistic practice from pagan and Satanic rituals.



- 3. Spreading the Gospel.** New Testament churches (Montanists, Novatianists, Donatists, etc.) were brutally and increasingly persecuted by the increasing political power of the Roman Catholic Church, but the Gospel light continued to spread in Europe and the Middle East.
 - a. Ireland, Scotland, and England.** The Gospel continued to thrive in the isles far from Roman influence. In 565, the Irish churches sent the missionary Columba to Scotland, where he started a Bible school. Another missionary, Columbanus, left Ireland in 589 and preached in France, Switzerland, and even Italy for many years.
 - b. Europe.** As the Roman Catholic Church became dominant in Europe, it suppressed not only education and the Bible, but also Baptist-based groups such as the Novatianists and Donatists. Nonetheless, the Gospel was preached by believers such as the Vaudois, the Cathari, and the Paterines, all of whom held Baptist beliefs and practices.
 - c. The Paulicians.** As with most early Christian groups, most of what was known about the Paulicians was based upon the slanders of their Roman Catholic persecutors. However, an ancient Paulician manuscript entitled *The Key of Truth* was discovered in Armenia in 1891, providing unusual insight into a group, from apostolic times, which held Baptist beliefs and practices.
 - **Origin.** Legend has it that the Apostle Thomas planted churches in Armenia, a mountainous area in what is now Turkey, parts of Iran, and parts of Russia. Gibbon states that the faith of the Paulicians stems from the First Century church in Antioch. Their name is derived from their frequent citation of the writings of the Apostle Paul.
 - **Constantine Revival and Persecution.** The Paulicians practiced their New Testament Christianity on the outer fringes of the Roman Empire, not incurring its notice and wrath until about 660 A.D., when a young Armenian named Constantine sheltered a Christian deacon who was fleeing from Muslim persecution. Constantine was given a copy of the New Testament, a simple act which led to Constantine's conversion and a revival in Armenia. In 690, Constantine was stoned to death by command of Empress Theodora, who later instigated a persecution which claimed the lives of 100,000 Armenian Paulicians.
 - **Free City-State of Teprice.** In the face of such intense persecution, one Paulician leader established the free city-state of Teprice, where they resisted the Catholic armies for 150 years, until Teprice was overthrown by Saracen armies. During that period, as was typical of Baptists, Teprice was "a shelter to every creed of belief or unbelief, to freedom of conscience long before it appeared elsewhere in the world" (J.W. Griffith, *A Manual of Church History*).

- **Baptist Beliefs and Practices.** The discovery of *The Key of Truth* unveiled the Baptist beliefs and practices of this Christian group which suffered persecution from the Roman Catholic Church because the Paulicians believed and followed the New Testament.
- **Biblical Authority.** They believed in the Old and New Testaments, practiced public reading of the Bible, and believed that every believer should have access to God's Word.
- **Believer's Baptism.** The Paulicians rejected infant baptism and baptism of unbelievers.
- **Rejection of Hierarchicalism, Ceremonialism, and Image Worship.**
- **Influence of the Paulicians.** The Paulicians sent missionaries to Eastern Europe (Thrace, Bulgaria, Bosnia, and Serbia); to those countries the Paulicians also fled during times of persecution; it is thought that the Bogomils were Paulicians in Bulgaria. From Eastern Europe, the Paulicians spread to Western Europe, where they were called various names. Many historians, such as Gibbon and Mosheim (a German Reformed historian), believe that the Paulicians were the forerunners of the Albigenses. Stringer says of the Paulicians: "It is interesting to note that historians estimate that the Paulicians influenced more people in Europe and the Mideast than modern Baptists do today."



C. The Later Dark Ages (1000-1500 A.D.)

1. Major Historical Developments

- a. **The Politicalization of the Papacy** was evident in the first half of the 11th Century when four different men ruled as popes -- at the same time -- each one under a different political leader. A similar event -- three or four popes at the same time -- occurred in the late 1300s and early 1400s.
- b. **The Crusades**, instigated by popes and monks, were an attempt to liberate the Holy Land from the Moslems. Tens of thousands of young men, motivated by papal promises of special indulgences and even salvation, marched toward Jerusalem during the seven crusades from 1076 to 1254. These crusades were ultimately unsuccessful in that the Holy Land was not liberated and Islam was not defeated. But there were other consequences, including the following:
 - The Crusades helped to relieve the crushing boredom of everyday life in the Dark Ages.
 - The Crusades enlarged the vision of European survivors, paving the way to the later Renaissance and Reformation.



Nonetheless, the Crusades violated the words of Jesus in John 18:36: "My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight . . ." Even today, the Moslem world accuses the Christian West of embarking on a new crusade. Did Jesus (or Baptists) ever call for a *jihad* (religious war)?

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c. **The Inquisitions**, begun in the latter part of the Dark Ages, were developed by the Roman Catholic Church for the investigation, apprehension, and condemnation of heretics. If the heretics (millions of which are mentioned in the next section) refused to recant, they would be handed over to state authorities, which would torture and execute them.

2. **Spreading the Gospel.** "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness" (Psalm 112:4). Despite the various efforts of the Roman Catholic Church to blot out all light during the Dark Ages, Baptist groups were quite robust throughout Europe and the Middle East, helping to lay the foundation for the Reformation upheavals.

a. **The Paterines**, descendants of the Novatianists, were numerous in the provinces of Milan and Turin in northern Italy. For centuries, when persecution was hottest, they "wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Hebrews 11:38). At other times (e.g., the early 11th Century), they were numerous, but always they separated from the apostate Roman Catholic Church, strongly opposed to infant baptism and the marriage of church and state.

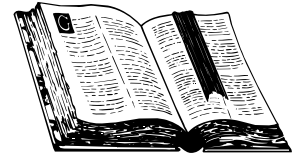


b. **The Petrobrussians** were named after Peter Du Bruys, a student of Abelard's at the University of Paris and a converted priest who joined the Albigenses (see later), preaching the Gospel in southern France in the early 1100s. He and his followers, who spread throughout France and the Netherlands, were declared to be heretics by the Roman Catholic Church for teaching the following Baptist doctrines:

- They taught the authority of Scripture alone, rejecting Catholic traditions.
- They practiced believer's baptism, rejecting infant baptism.
- They taught that the church was a spiritual body composed of regenerated believers.
- They rejected the use of images and crucifixes.
- They rejected transubstantiation.
- They rejected prayers and alms for the dead.



- c. **The Albigenses**, named after the town of Albi in southern France, were descendants of the Paulicians in Armenia, who were descended from the days of the apostles. As the Paulicians spread from Armenia to Eastern Europe (where they were called Bogomils), some of them continued westward, establishing a great contingent of believers in the little town of Albi. The Albigenses held the same doctrines as the Paulicians, including the following:
- They accepted the Scriptures over the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - They rejected the centralized concept of the Roman Catholic Church, instead forming local congregations with pastoral leadership.
 - Most of all, the Albigenses rejected infant baptism, baptizing only those who made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ.



Perhaps no Christian group was more persecuted than the Albigenses. According to Pastor Hammett in his book, *The History of Baptists*:

The Catholics at first attempted to convert the Albigenses through ecclesiastical coercion. This failed largely because the simple Albigensians knew the Word of God. Lateran II (1137 A.D.) and the Council of Tours (1163 A.D.) condemned them as heretics. Pope Innocent III (1160-1216 A.D.) initiated at least 4 crusades against the Albigenses beginning in 1208 A.D. He offered heaven to all who engaged in a holy war against these heretics.

The Crusades against believers in southern France was more successful than the Crusades against the Moslems in the Middle East. But just as believers have done since Acts 8:1, the surviving Albigenses fled to Italy and to Germany, contributing to the subsequent Anabaptist movement.

d. **The Waldenses**

- **Origin.** The Waldenses were the Vaudois ("people of the valley"), New Testament believers who lived for centuries in relative safety in the Pyrenees of France and in the Alps and valleys of northern Italy and Switzerland. Just as the Paulicians lived in relative safety for hundreds of years in Armenia, sending out missionaries to Eastern Europe, the Vaudois did likewise, sending missionaries throughout Western Europe. Undoubtedly, there was much interaction between the Waldenses and the Albigenses.
- **Peter Waldo.** Peter Waldo was a wealthy Catholic merchant in Lyon, France. After his conversion, Peter realized that the Roman Catholic traditions differed greatly from the teachings of Jesus and the apostles in the Bible. Convicted, he joined with the Waldensians, gave up the merchant life and formed a group of itinerant preachers of the Gospel, called "the poor men of Lyon," who preached the Gospel throughout France, Italy, and Bohemia. Just as the revival under Constantine brought the Paulicians under the wrathful eye of the Roman Catholic Church, the revival under Peter Waldo brought the wrath of the Roman Catholic Church down upon the Waldenses.

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- **Baptist Doctrines.** Just as the Albigenses were labeled as heretics, so were the Waldenses, who held similar Baptist beliefs, including the following:
 - They accepted the Bible as the authoritative guide for the Christian life.
 - They rejected the Roman Catholic Church's claim to be the true church.
 - They rejected infant baptism and believed in believer's baptism.
 - They believed in salvation by grace, rejecting Catholic ideas of works salvation, purgatory, and prayers for the dead.
 - They rejected other Roman Catholic traditions such as the veneration of Mary and the saints, indulgences, prayers to the saints, and use of images.
- **Persecution.** As with the Albigenses, the Waldenses were forbidden to preach without a license, excommunicated, and finally persecuted from the early 1200s all the way to the 1600s. As a result of such persecutions, the Waldenses were scattered throughout Europe.

e. The Lollards

- **Walter Lollard.** Many of the scattered Waldenses ended up in Bohemia, a mountainous central European province (in what is now the Czech Republic). In 1315, a Dutchman named Walter Lollard became a pastor there; he preached widely throughout Europe, bringing revival to the Waldenses and the Albigenses. His meteoric preaching career was cut short when he was captured and burned at the stake in 1320.
- **Doctrines.** Walter Lollard and his followers preached salvation by grace, rejected infant baptism, and rejected the other man-made traditions of the Roman Catholic Church.
- **Persecution and Scattering.** One of the great stories about persecutors involves a Jacobean monk named Eachard, who, after conducting a terrible persecution against the Lollards in France, finally understood and accepted the Lollard position on separating from the corrupted church. The persecutor, like the Apostle Paul, became the persecuted and was eventually burned at the stake for his faith in Jesus Christ.
- The Lollards fled to all parts of Europe, and most importantly, to England, where they found great spiritual success, and where they influenced and were eventually led by John Wycliffe.

f. John Wycliffe, the Morningstar of the Reformation.

John Wycliffe, who graduated with a Doctor of Theology degree from Oxford University in 1372, was a Lollard who preached and wrote about the following Baptist doctrines:

- The sole authority of Scripture. He strongly denounced the false teaching of the infallibility of the pope.
- Independent churches
- Separation of church and state
- Justification by faith
- Renunciation of infant baptism



John Wycliffe

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When the Bishop of London prohibited him from preaching, Wycliffe obliged, confining himself to translating the Bible from Latin into English (one of the great examples in history of the law of unintended consequences). As a Lollard, Wycliffe strongly believed in taking the Gospel and the Bible to the people, holding to the authority of Scripture and that all people should read the Bible for themselves. These beliefs led to his English translation of the Bible, thus preparing England for the coming Reformation.

D. Personal Application. How does this lesson help you with the following?

- 1. Personal walk with Jesus, family life, and church life.** Has there been a "Dark Ages" in your life? Did you discover the Light at the end of the tunnel? His name is Jesus. John 8:12: "Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 12:46: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."
- 2. Contending for the faith.** Some Christians have taken the position that we must take up arms to contend for the faith. Would a Muslim *jihadist* agree with such a position? Would Jesus?
- 3. Spreading the Gospel.** Is the following note convicting to you? "It is interesting to note that historians estimate that the Paulicians influenced more people in Europe and the Mideast than modern Baptists do today."
- 4. Advancing religious and civil liberty in America and around the world**
 - What do you think about the papal promise to Crusaders that they could earn a place in Heaven by fighting the Moslem occupiers of the Holy Land? or the Baptist believers in Europe? Is that doctrine any different than what is promised to Islamic *jihadists*?
 - If you still have problems with the Baptist doctrine of separation of church and state, are you bothered by the Roman Catholic Inquisitions, which turned heretics over to the government for execution?

