

# **Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, Waldensians, Lecture 11, The Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell**

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This is Dr. Kevin Frederick in his teaching on the history of the Waldensians. This is session 11, The Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell.

This particular sermon is entitled The Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell.

It covers the story of the Waldensian people and how Cromwell and his secretary, John Milton, were very influential in helping to preserve the Waldensians during a time of great persecution. To start it with, though, I look at 2 Corinthians, starting with the fourth chapter of the first verse and going through the seventh verse. Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.

We have renounced the shameful things that one hides. We refuse to practice cunning or falsify God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, for we do not proclaim ourselves.

We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who said, let the light shine out of the darkness, who was shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus. But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. In the mid-17th century, Oliver Cromwell was the most powerful man in England and perhaps the most powerful Protestant leader in all of Europe.

After a decade of leading England's Protestant army to repeated victories over the army of England's King Charles I, Cromwell's popularity propelled him to the highest office of the land. He was elected in 1653 to rule the Commonwealth of England as Lord Protector of England. During the brief five years of his tenure as Lord Protector, Cromwell led England towards embracing democratic principles that favored the common person.

During that brief window of time, he also played a major role in the survival of the Waldensians. Cromwell was one of the most remarkable rulers in modern European history, partly due to the fact that he was a powerful military and political leader and partly due to the coercive forcefulness of his personality that created contradictions in his leadership style, which, when carried out, wavered between cruelty and benevolence. As a military leader, he was a brilliant strategist.

He was also fierce and merciless in his persecution of his enemy, the Catholics, especially in Ireland. On the other hand, in his later years, he advocated in Parliament for religious tolerance of dissenting Protestant sects. Cromwell conveyed a compassionate nature to his political allies but was also vicious with his political enemies by humiliating them on the floor of Parliament, and in some cases, he literally strong-armed political opponents to vote in favor of his policies.

To understand his meteoric rise to power and the vital role he played with the Waldensians, we need to first explore the issues impacting England in the 1640s. For a period of approximately 100 years, from the 1540s to the 1640s, the Roman Catholic Church, in response to the Protestant Reform Movement, had put tremendous efforts into reforming itself in an effort to address the many criticisms leveled at them by leading Protestant theologians, and to try to attract back many of the converts that had become Protestant Christians. This historical period was called the Counter-Reformation.

Concurrent with the Counter-Reformation, and for a number of decades to follow, the Catholic Church, in cooperation with Catholic monarchs across Europe, who were part of the Holy Roman Empire, retaliated with military force against the widespread impacts of the Protestant Reformation. Throughout the Counter-Reformation, and across several nations in Europe, battles and pogroms of extermination were waged by Catholic armies in an effort to eradicate the Protestant influence in the Holy Roman Empire. In England, the policies of King Charles I called for a heavy-handed Catholic rule to regain control of the country.

The king and his loyalists found themselves in sharp opposition to the Protestant-controlled Parliament. As a result, a civil war erupted in England in 1642 over the most fundamental question of how the country was to be ruled. By this point in time, Cromwell was the primary military leader of the Protestant army of England.

He and his army of commoners, the new model army, were derisively called the Roundheads because of their closely cropped hair and because of their parliamentary exclusion of bishops and Catholics, peers from the House of the Lords. In turn, the king's army was largely comprised of wealthy landowners, and a large percentage of their soldiers rode on horses. The Protestants, familiar with the Spanish mounted troops, the Caballeros, which had a few years earlier conducted a

brutal campaign of persecution against Dutch Protestants, had begun to pejoratively refer to King Charles's troops as Caballeros.

The term for Caballeros in English is Cavaliers, and that was the derisive term popularized by the Protestant army. However, King Charles I liked the term Cavaliers, and soon the king and the loyalist horsemen adopted that term, Cavaliers, as a title of military pride. Under the leadership of Cromwell as lieutenant-general and his co-commander Sir Thomas Fairfax, the Parliament's 20,000-strong new model army was prepared to take on the king's Cavalier army.

Characterized by his foes as a religious hothead, Cromwell governed his army with strict puritanical discipline, which included the daily practice of singing hymns, listening to sermons, and refraining from drinking any alcohol. The royalists mockingly derided the new model army and called them the noodles for their constant head-bobbing in prayer, but puritanical discipline made the Protestant troops a well-organized and well-focused army. In battle after battle with the king's troops, the new model army was victorious.

The definitive battle of the Civil War occurred on June 14, 1645, at Naseby, where Cromwell's troops captured 5,000 prisoners and a cache of royal jewels worth 100,000 British pounds. They also recovered the private correspondence of the king, the contents of which demonstrated the ultimate betrayal of the king towards his Protestant subjects. Cromwell and the Protestants in Parliament were filled with righteous indignation and used the private correspondence of the king to condemn him.

He Cromwell bullied the Parliament to sign the death warrant of the king. He shouted down the waivers, flicked ink at them, and, in one case, actually held down a doubter's hand to the page until he signed. All loyalists and allies of the king were banned from the trial of the king in what became known as Pride's Purge.

The hardcore Cromwell tried the king and found him guilty as a tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy to the good people of this nation. King Charles I was sentenced to death by severed head for his crimes against the people. However, the execution had a sobering effect on the people of England.

The crowd that gathered to watch his execution was subdued and stunned to see the death sentence of their own king followed through. The mere thought of executing an English monarch was most unsettling to the common folk, even though they disagreed with many of the decisions of his reign. Charles I was the only English monarch to have ever been condemned by trial and executed.

The execution of Charles I was the single most remarkable event in the course of English history, and the person who brought it to pass, Oliver Cromwell, was the

single most remarkable man. The leader of the Protestants, Cromwell, emerged victorious over the aristocracy and imposed a measure of austere religious control over the nation, reflective of Cromwell's deep and rigid Calvinism. A series of votes after the execution of Charles I resulted in the abolishment of both the monarchy and the House of Lords of Parliament, and in May of 1649, England was declared a commonwealth.

Over the next two years, Cromwell led ruthless campaigns in Ireland to suppress the Irish Catholic revolt there. His troops massacred whole villages and were so brutal against Catholics that resentment of the name of Cromwell by Irish Catholics exists in modern times. Over the course of the six-year English Civil War, the Protestant Roundheads, under the leadership of Cromwell, were victorious in thirty consecutive battles, while the Cavaliers never scored a single victory.

Throughout the six-year Civil War, whenever Cromwell returned to London victorious from the field battle, he was widely hailed for his military genius. As a result, Cromwell was repeatedly urged by many of his followers to take the British crown, but he adamantly and repeatedly refused, insisting that a coronation would have gone against everything he stood for as a leader of the people and as a defender of the core principles of democracy and Puritanism. In December of 1653, Cromwell was elected Lord Protector of England, and when he accepted his title, he wore plain black clothing to keep the event from being perceived as a coronation.

From the margins of political power, Cromwell, the military commander, promoted religious reform as a strict Calvinist. But once he was elected to the leadership of Parliament, Cromwell enacted a series of moderate rules and progressive reforms within the nation, redistributing power and opportunity to a growing middle class. Cromwell was serving as Lord Protector of England for a mere sixteen months when news of the 1655 Easter Massacre of the Waldensians in their homelands reached the years in early May of that same year.

Cromwell and his secretary, John Milton, responded with alacrity, and soon, news of the massacre resounded throughout the Protestant nations of Europe. This is the intersection between Oliver Cromwell and the Waldensian people, as a result of the Black Plague that ravaged the Waldensian population in the 1630s throughout the Cottian Alps, fourteen of sixteen installed Waldensian pastors died, leaving whole-faith communities throughout the region devoid of spiritual leadership.

In response to a plea for assistance from Geneva, the Swiss Reformed Church sent fourteen new French-speaking Huguenot pastors from the seminary at Geneva to fill the vacant pulpits of the Waldensian parishes. Over the next two decades, tensions mounted between the Waldensian communities, led by articulate Swiss Reformed pastors, against their Catholic sovereign, the Duke of Savoy, who viewed his Waldensian subjects as a religious and political threat. Over time, the House of Savoy

increasingly suppressed the freedoms which had been afforded the Waldensians at the Treaty of Cavour in 1561.

By the early 1650s, the tolerance of the Catholic Duke towards the Waldensian subjects resulted in ordering the tight restriction of Waldensians in and around their homelands. Over 1,000 Waldensian families who had expanded to live in the border regions of their homelands had been forced back into the geographical confines of what would become known as the Waldensian Ghetto. Tempers flared, and disputes arose on both sides and soon the House of Savoy responded by ordering 4,000 Savoyard troops under the leadership of the Marquis de Pienaise into the valleys with the unpublicized goal of completely removing all Waldensians and repopulating their homelands with Catholic loyalists.

Pienaise was both an unscrupulous and ineffective military commander, and his undisciplined leadership would later create chaos and mayhem in the execution of their orders against the Waldensians. Pienaise's Savoyard troops also included a company of angry Irish Catholic troops who had revenge on their minds for the brutal persecution a few years before of the Irish Catholics by Cromwell's forces. Pienaise and his commanders had devised an underhanded plan to infiltrate the Waldensian communities by forcing each Waldensian household to quarter the troops in their homes, with the promise that negotiations for a peaceful settlement would be forthcoming.

However, the soldiers stationed in the homes of the Waldensian citizens were put on alert to rise at 4 a.m. on Easter morning, April 12, 1655, and were commanded to slaughter every Waldensian man, woman, and child in their households. This order was brutally carried out in the Lucerna Valley that morning and was followed by three weeks of reign of terror that resulted in the massacre of many thousands of lives throughout the Waldensian homelands. Waldensian survivors carried the news to Geneva, and within three weeks of the Easter massacre, news had reached England and Oliver Cromwell.

Cromwell ordered a full report in writing detailing the massacre of the Waldensians, and the following is an excerpt of the official findings as submitted to Cromwell. No distinction was given to age or gender, not even if there were children. Regardless of whether they were rich or poor, educated or not, the treachery that followed included many whose homes burned with them inside.

Some hanged from their feet, others torn to pieces. Some slashed and cut, and then salt and pepper poured into their wounds, and put their shirts on again. Some were stripped naked and tied together with many others and tumbled down the mountains.

Some were nailed to the ground, others impaled on stakes. Many women were raped, and then their heads chopped off. Children were thrown down the mountains, and others were pulled apart by the soldiers.

Babies were thrown in the air and gored on the pikes of some soldiers. Once they finished in Lucerna Valley, the Pellicci Valley, they went on to the valleys of Peru, Chisone Valley, and the San Martín-Germanosca Valley, where they commanded the people to attend mass or face exile in 24 hours. Once the details were known across Protestant Europe of the extent of this massacre and the subsequent three-week reign of terror against the Waldensians, the response was that of great outrage amongst both the leaders and the citizens of the nations, which were aligned with Protestantism.

Cromwell's own personal secretary was poet and writer John Milton. Since the 1640s, Milton had studied the ancientest of Reformed churches, the Waldensians. From his studies, he surmised in them the ties to the origins of the true church of ancient Christianity.

After reading the report from witnesses in the Waldensian valleys who had seen the recorded atrocities, Milton wrote from Cromwell, strongly worded decrees to Protestant leaders in Sweden, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, and Transylvania, with the extent of rallying moral and material support for Cromwell's strategy of applying great diplomatic pressure to the House of Savoy. The response of these nations was swift and forceful. Milton also wrote a very detailed account of the atrocities charged against the Savoyard troops and leveled a stinging and vitriolic indictment to the leadership of the House of Savoy.

The unified and vigorous response of the Protestant leaders in Europe against the Duke was completely unexpected by the House of Savoy. Milton also penned the famous sonnet on the massacre in the Piedmont, which goes this way: Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints whose bones lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold. Even then, who kept thy true so pure of old when all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones, forget not in thy book record their groans.

Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled mother with infant down the rocks, their moans the veils redoubled to the hills, and they to heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes so, or all the Italian fields were stilled out sway the triple tyrant that from these may grow and a hundredfold. Who have learned thy way early may fly the Babylonian woe.

Cromwell was deeply moved to pity for the Waldensians and greatly angered by the reports of the Waldensian massacres led by the Savoyard troops. He dispatched a special envoy with diplomatic status, Sir Samuel Moreland Turin, to gain an audience with the Duke throughout Protestant Britain. Cromwell ordered the complete report

entitled *The Collection of Papers Sent to His Highness, the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, concerning the bloody and barbarous massacres of Protestants dwelling in the Valley of the Piedmont*.

And he ordered that to be disseminated and read in every Protestant parish. It was also shared with other European leaders. This document, along with Milton's sonnet, had the effect of unifying Protestant Europe's condemnation of the Duke of Savoy's treatment of his own subjects.

Cromwell also ordered a day of fast, humiliation, and prayer to be set for June 14th, 1655, in remembrance of the victims of the Easter massacre. On that same day, Cromwell called for the liberal collection for the relief of the distressed and persecuted Waldensians who, if still alive, were now wandering with their wives and their little ones in hunger, cold, and nakedness. All across Europe, news of the massacre and details of the numerous atrocity stories were widely shared with the populace, and the citizenry of those nations urged their governments to apply diplomatic pressure on the House of Savoy and its cruel treatment of its own subjects.

The alacrity of the multinational response and the condemnation of the House of Savoy's treatment of its own subjects surprised the ducal court and caught them completely off guard. Milton prepared a speech in Latin to be delivered by Moreland to the House of Savoy. In it, he abandoned all diplomatic restraint and unleashed his full fury against the Duke's treatment of his own subjects.

The following excerpt conveys the tone of the letter. Oh, the fired houses which are yet smoking, the torn limbs, the ground defiled with blood. Angels shudder with horror.

Men are astounded. Heaven itself seems astonished at the cries of dying men and the very earth to blush. Virgins ravished.

Cannibalism. Bedridden old men burned alive. Infants dashed against the rocks or their throats cut.

These and other horrors are listed in the speech. Moreland concluded by reading this speech before the ducal court with these words. Do not, O thou most high God, do not thou take refuge or revenge which is due to so great wickedness and horrible villainies.

Let thy blood, O Christ, wash away this blood. Charles Emmanuel II, the Duke of Savoy, twenty-one years old at the time, was himself politically impotent. His mother, Madame Royale, took control of the situation and responded for the House of Savoy with dismissive skepticism as to the veracity of the reports.

Even France was pressured by England with the threat of holding up a separate treaty between the two nations in order to urge a settlement between the House of Savoy and the Waldensians. But the House of Savoy skillfully delayed any attempt at negotiations. While awaiting a diplomatic settlement, Cromwell, in order to pressure a favorable outcome for the Waldensians, even urged the Swiss to launch an attack against Savoy.

But the Swiss were leery of a civil war with the House of Savoy since several of their southern cantons were in provinces controlled by Savoy. Weeks passed, and the Protestant diplomats pushed for the passage of an expeditious treaty. In late August of 1655, the House of Savoy proposed a truce of sorts, which was reluctantly signed. Its proposal was clearly deemed to be unsatisfactory for the Waldensians by the Protestant diplomats.

Cromwell had been out delayed and outmaneuvered. Cromwell, frustrated by the diplomatic failure, offered the Waldensian refugees the offer to resettle in lands in Ireland that he and his troops had conquered a few years before. Ironically, these lands had previously been owned by Irish Catholics, and their inhabitants had themselves been killed or exiled by the brutality of a Protestant army in a heavily Catholic region of Northern Ireland.

However, the Waldensians were not interested in any settlement plan that would take them away from their beloved homelands. Later reflection. John Milton firmly believed from reading the only available history in his day and time about the Waldensian people, written by Pierre Giles and published in 1644, which supported the claim that the roots of Waldensianism traced all the way back to the fourth century AD and the donation of Constantine to Pope Sylvester.

Milton and Cromwell both firmly believed that the Waldensians were the true church, with their origins in ancient times. Their deeply held passions for puritanical Protestantism had led them to believe that the defense of the persecuted Waldensians was the defense of the true Christian faith itself. Milton's correspondence with Protestant heads of state combined with Cromwell's decisive and emphatic political leadership amongst Protestant Europe meant that Protestant Europe also came to believe that the Waldensians were the ancient keepers of Christianity as well.

It was widely believed in their day and time that an attack on the Waldensians was an attack on the body of Christ itself. In other words, Cromwell and Milton both believed that to defend the Waldensians was to defend the essence of Christianity. Only by understanding this fact can we grasp the deeper relevance of Cromwell and Milton's influence on European politics and power in their day.



Under Cromwell's forceful leadership, enhanced by Milton's intellect and through the power of his pen to influence public sentiment, Protestant Europe was galvanized as one powerful force in defense of the Waldensian refugees. In its day and time, this level of Protestant diplomatic unity was unprecedented in European history. To our modern-day sensibilities, we can readily identify the inconsistencies and double standards at work in Cromwell's personality and his political and military leadership.

The same man whose military leadership would order the destruction of whole Catholic communities with brutal and devastating force would then turn around in a few short years and coordinate the financial support of every Protestant church in England and galvanize the political intervention of Protestant nations across Europe in defense of the persecuted Waldensians. His tolerance as Lord Protector of various Protestant sects, which were seeking religious freedom in 17th century England, had far-reaching effects on British development of the rights of religious freedoms. While his intolerance of his political opponents in Parliament, who were ruthlessly targeted and publicly ridiculed, demonstrated the tactics of a brutal political dictator.

In his fervent passion for his puritanical faith, Cromwell was blinded to his harsh treatment and destruction of whole Catholic communities. However, Cromwell lived in the midst of the Counter-Reformation, when the Roman Catholic Church was just as much if not more so, engaged in the slaughter of whole Protestant communities. Roman Catholicism was a deadly and dangerous enemy of Protestantism, as evidenced in the Barbarous Massacre Act upon the Waldensians.

Neither the Catholics nor the Protestants had exemplified the peace of Christ toward each other. Rather, both sides fell short of the will of God for peaceful coexistence. In many respects, Oliver Cromwell was a brilliant military and political leader in England and undoubtedly served as the Lord Protector of the Waldensians at one of their most vulnerable and threatened points in all of their 850-year history.

Without Cromwell and Milton serving as international Protestant advocates for the Waldensians in the late 1650s, their survival as a people would have faced a far more perilous future. In short, Cromwell was an enigma in British and European history. At the core of his faith, he remained humble before God and the people, as demonstrated in his repeated refusal to accept the crown of England despite strong and sustained encouragement from many political operatives and citizens alike.

Even though he abused power in his treatment of his political adversaries and applied great pressure against undecided politicians in his day, he was a progressive politician with an eye towards the furthering of democracy for the commoner. In the final analysis during Cromwell's short five-year reign as Lord Protector of England and in his self-appointed role as Lord Protector of the Waldensians, Cromwell did more to promote the principles of democracy for the common folk of England than had the British monarchs or any other leader before him. In like manner, he and John Milton

did more to raise the profile of the persecution against the Waldensians and their cause in Protestant Europe at the peak of the Counter-Reformation than had any other non-Waldensian.

But we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be clear that the extraordinary power belongs to God and does not belong to us. An interesting footnote, Cromwell, as Lord Protector, ruled England based on the premise of acting on what was good for the people and not what pleased the masses. And for nearly five years, he forced the people a heavy diet of godliness.

All Sunday sports were banned and restrictions were placed on the sale of alcohol, and crimes of immorality were punished publicly. The religious expectations and restrictions imposed by the Puritan-controlled Parliament in the 1640s included a ban on the celebration of Christmas as a season of joy and mirth. This was partly an attempt to demonstrate complete dominance over all Catholic influence in the nation, but it also was the result of the imposition of a strict Calvinist code of behavior over the people.

As a result of the victory over the King's Army at Naseby in 1645, Cromwell and his loyal followers banned every practice that hindered at Catholicism, including the celebration of Christmas as a holiday of joy. The following ballad was penned in the months following the victory at Naseby and reflected not only the opposition of the Roman Catholic citizens but the beginnings of Protestant resistance to the austerity of 17th-century English Puritanism. It's called *The World Turned Upside Down*.

Listen to me, and you shall hear, news hath not been this thousand years since  
Herod, Caesar, and many more, you never heard the like before. Holy days are  
despised, new fashions are devised, and O Christmas is kicked out of town, yet let's  
be content, and the times lament. You see, the world is turned upside down.

The wise men rejoiced to see our Savior Christ's nativity, the angels brought good  
tidings, and the shepherds rejoiced and sang. Let all honest men take example by  
them, why should we from good laws be bound? Yet let's be content, and the times  
lament. You see, the world is upside down.

Command is given; we must obey and quite forget, O Christmas Day, kill a thousand  
men or a town regain. We will give thanks and praise, amen. The wine pot shall clink,  
and we will feast and drink, and then strange notions will abound.

Yet let's be content, and the times lament. You see, the world is turned upside down.  
Our lords and knights, the gentry too, do mean old fashions to forgo.

They set a porter at the gate, and none must enter on the right. They count it as a sin when poor people come in; hospitality itself is drowned. Yet let's be content, and the times lament.

You see, the world is turned upside down. The serving men do sit and whine and think it heirlong dinner time. The butler's still out of the way or else my lady keeps the key.

The poor old cook in the larder doth look. Where is no goodness to be found? Yet let's be content, and the times lament. You see, the world is turned upside down.

To conclude, I'll tell you the news that's right. Christmas was killed at Naseby Fight. Charity was slain at the same time.

Jack Deltroth, too, a friend of mine, likewise then did die. Roast beef and shred pie, pig, goose, and capon; no quarter found. Yet let's be content and the times lament.

You see, the world is turned upside down. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen. This is great work in his teaching of the history of the Waldensians.

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