

# Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1, Roots of Waldo's Conversion (1172-1207 AD) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1, Roots of Waldo's Conversion, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture excerpt by Kevin Frederick, a Waldensian Presbyterian pastor, introduces **Peter Waldo**, the founder of the Waldensian movement in the late 12th century. It explores the scriptural basis for Waldo's **conversion**, specifically the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler in Luke 18, which prompted Waldo to sell his possessions and live a life of poverty. The text details Waldo's background as a wealthy merchant in Lyon and his increasing desire to understand scripture in the **vernacular**, leading him to commission its translation. Waldo's radical actions, including giving away his wealth during a famine in 1172, led to him and his followers, known as the Poor of Lyon, being **excommunicated** and later condemned as heretics by the Catholic Church.

**2. 12 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → Waldensians).**



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### 3. Briefing Document: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1, Roots of Waldo's Conversion

#### Briefing Document: The Origins of the Waldensian Movement

##### Overview:

This briefing document summarizes the foundational elements of the Waldensian movement as presented in the first lecture by Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, pastor of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church. The lecture focuses on the conversion of Peter Waldo (also known as Valdez), a wealthy merchant from Lyon, France, in the late 12th century, and the initial principles that led to the formation of the movement. Dr. Frederick emphasizes the scriptural basis for Waldo's actions, the societal context of his time, and the initial reception and subsequent condemnation of his teachings.

##### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

1. **Waldo's Conversion Triggered by Scripture:** The lecture identifies Luke 18:18-25, the story of the rich young ruler, as a pivotal scripture in Waldo's conversion. The ruler asks Jesus, "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus' response, particularly the instruction to "sell all you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me," deeply impacted Waldo. Dr. Frederick highlights that this passage led Waldo to strive to live according to the literal interpretation of Christ's instructions.
- **Quote:** "This is a story describing the origins of the movement started by a 12th-century man named Waldo, who, upon being confronted with the biblical mandate, strived to live to the letter of the instruction of Jesus Christ." (p. 2)
- **Quote (Scripture):** "sell all you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come and follow me." (p. 1)
1. **Waldo's Background and Context:** Waldo was a wealthy merchant in the prosperous city of Lyon, France, and initially a devout Christian within the Roman Catholic Church. He was well-connected and potentially held a lay leadership role. Driven by a desire to understand scripture personally, Waldo commissioned church leaders to translate parts of the Bible into the vernacular (the common language of the region). This was an unusual request at the time but went unnoticed by the Catholic hierarchy.

- **Quote:** "A wealthy merchant who made his fortune in the mercantile trade of Lyon, France, in the late 12th century, Waldo, Valdez in French, was also a religious man devoted to the Catholic Church." (p. 2)
  - **Quote:** "In the years leading up to Waldo's conversion of faith to live a life of poverty, Waldo had commissioned two of the church leaders, who were well-versed in Latin, to translate parts of the Bible for him in the common language of the region, so that he would be able to read and study the scriptures for himself." (p. 2)
1. **Waldo's Radical Actions and Interpretation:** Waldo's study of the translated scriptures led him to a literal interpretation of Jesus' commands regarding wealth and poverty. In 1172, during a severe famine, Waldo began distributing his wealth to the poor. This culminated on August 15th, the Feast of the Assumption, when he "scattered money around to the poor in the streets, saying that no one can serve God and mammon from Matthew 6."
  - **Quote:** "Valdez, Waldo, between May 27th and August 1st of 1072, gave regular doles three days a week of bread, soup, and meat to whoever asked for it. On August 15th of that year, on the feast of the Assumption, he scattered money around to the poor in the streets, saying that no one can serve God and mammon from Matthew 6." (p. 3)
  - **Quote:** "Nevertheless, he reportedly justified his actions as a vengeance on his enemies, who had enslaved him to money and to create things, and he also said that he had done this to teach his hearers to trust God rather than riches." (p. 3)
  1. **Impact on Waldo's Personal Life:** Waldo's radical actions were met with disbelief and concern from his friends and family, including his wife, who valued their affluent lifestyle. He made legal arrangements to provide for his wife and daughters but effectively distanced himself from them as his commitment to discipleship became his primary focus.
  - **Quote:** "This created a great rift between Waldo and his family, especially when Waldo began to make legal arrangements to allocate a significant portion of his wealth and property holdings to provide for his wife and two daughters. To follow the scriptural mandate to give away and to follow Christ, Waldo distanced himself from his own family, effectively divorcing himself." (p. 3)
  1. **Emphasis on Vernacular Scripture and Oral Proclamation:** In a largely illiterate society (over 90% in 12th-century Europe), Waldo and his followers, known as the

Poor of Lyon, prioritized proclaiming and teaching scripture in the common language. This was a significant departure from the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on Latin as the language of scripture.

- **Quote:** "Waldo and his followers brought an increased focus on the importance of oral communication by proclaiming and teaching the words of scripture in the language of the people. This was a radical change in the Roman Catholic Church, which believed the language of scripture should be limited to Latin, a language understood by little more than one percent of the population." (p. 3)
1. **Conflict with the Roman Catholic Church:** Waldo's ministry, initially popular, was perceived as a threat by the Catholic hierarchy. He and his followers were excommunicated in 1184 and later condemned as heretics in 1215. This marked the beginning of organized persecution against the Poor of Lyon.
- **Quote:** "The effectiveness of Waldo's ministry was perceived to be a threat, however, by the Roman Catholic hierarchy, who condemned the followers of Waldo and their public proclamation of scripture. He and his followers, who were called the Poor of Lyon, were excommunicated in 1184. Later, in 1215, they were condemned as heretics." (p. 3-4)
1. **Long-Term Impact and Mythologization:** Over centuries of persecution, the specific historical details of Waldo's conversion, such as the 1172 famine, were largely forgotten within Waldensian communities. Instead, three separate myths emerged across Western Europe, which interpreted and preserved the memory of Waldo's response to suffering.
- **Quote:** "Over this period of several hundred years, three separate myths surrounding the conversion of Waldo emerged within the Waldensian communities that supplanted the factual data surrounding the famine that impacted France and Germany in 1172." (p. 4)

### **Key Takeaways:**

- Peter Waldo's conversion was deeply rooted in his literal interpretation of specific biblical passages, particularly the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler.
- His decision to renounce his wealth and live in poverty was a radical act within the societal and religious context of 12th-century France.

- The emphasis on translating and proclaiming scripture in the vernacular was a central tenet of Waldo's movement and a key point of conflict with the Roman Catholic Church.
- The Waldensian movement faced early opposition and condemnation, leading to centuries of persecution and the eventual development of alternative narratives surrounding Waldo's conversion within the community.

**Further Considerations:**

- The lecture highlights the significance of the Waldensian heritage for the Waldensian Presbyterian Church.
- It sets the stage for further exploration of the development and history of the Waldensian people.
- The mention of Giorgio Turin's work suggests that there is more detailed historical scholarship on the Waldensians.

## 4. Study Guide: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1, Roots of Waldo's Conversion

### Waldensian Origins: A Study Guide

#### I. Key Concepts and Themes:

- **Peter Waldo's Conversion:** Understand the pivotal event that led to the formation of the Waldensian movement, focusing on the specific scripture that influenced him (Luke 18:18-23).
- **Biblical Literalism:** Explore Waldo's approach to interpreting and applying scripture, particularly Jesus's command to the rich young man.
- **Wealth and Poverty:** Analyze Waldo's renunciation of his wealth and its motivations, considering the social and religious context of the 12th century.
- **Vernacular Scripture:** Understand the significance of Waldo's commissioning the translation of biblical texts into the common language and its implications.
- **Oral Tradition:** Recognize the importance of oral communication in a largely illiterate society and how Waldo and his followers utilized it.
- **Conflict with the Catholic Church:** Detail the reasons for the growing tension and eventual excommunication and condemnation of Waldo and his followers.
- **Historical Documentation:** Acknowledge the limitations of historical sources regarding Waldo's life and the emergence of later myths.
- **The Poor of Lyon:** Understand this early designation for Waldo and his followers.
- **Heresy and Persecution:** Recognize the shift in the Catholic Church's view of the Waldensians and the subsequent organized persecution.

#### II. Quiz:

Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What specific passage from the Bible profoundly influenced Peter Waldo's decision to change his life? Briefly explain what this passage conveyed to him.
2. Describe Waldo's profession and social standing before his conversion. What motivated him to commission the translation of scripture?

3. What was the initial reaction of Waldo's family and friends to his decision to renounce his wealth? Explain their primary concerns.
4. Why was the translation of the Bible into the vernacular considered a significant and potentially controversial act in the 12th century?
5. What was the original name given to Peter Waldo's followers? What did this name signify about their early practices?
6. Explain why the Roman Catholic Church eventually viewed Waldo and his followers as a threat, leading to their excommunication.
7. According to the lecture, what were some of the social circumstances in 1172 that may have contributed to Waldo's actions?
8. How did the limited literacy rates in 12th-century Europe impact the way religious teachings were disseminated? How did Waldo engage with this reality?
9. What happened to the "Poor of Lyon" after their initial excommunication in 1184? What label did the Catholic Church later apply to them?
10. According to historian Giorgio Turin, what happened to the precise historical details of Waldo's conversion within Waldensian communities over time?

### **III. Answer Key to Quiz:**

1. The passage from Luke 18:18-23, the story of the rich young ruler, deeply influenced Waldo. Jesus's instruction to sell all possessions, give to the poor, and follow him resonated with Waldo's desire for eternal life and a deeper spiritual commitment.
2. Before his conversion, Waldo was a wealthy merchant in Lyon, France, involved in the mercantile trade. He commissioned the translation of parts of the Bible into the common language so that he could personally read and study the scriptures.
3. Waldo's family and friends, especially his wife, were greatly concerned and thought he had gone mad due to his radical actions of giving away his wealth. They valued their comfortable lifestyle and could not comprehend his sudden and drastic change in priorities.
4. Translating the Bible into the vernacular was significant because the Catholic Church believed scripture should remain in Latin, a language understood by very few. Waldo's actions allowed common people to access and interpret scripture directly, bypassing the Church's exclusive control.

5. Waldo's early followers were called the "Poor of Lyon." This name reflected their commitment to poverty and their identification with the less fortunate, mirroring Waldo's own actions and interpretations of scripture.
6. The Roman Catholic Church viewed Waldo and his followers as a threat because their public proclamation and teaching of scripture in the vernacular challenged the Church's authority and control over religious interpretation. Their growing popularity also posed a perceived threat.
7. In 1172, a severe drought and famine affected France and Germany, causing significant suffering among the poor. The lecture suggests that witnessing this hardship may have influenced Waldo's decision to renounce his wealth and provide aid.
8. Due to high illiteracy rates in 12th-century Europe, oral tradition was the primary means of disseminating knowledge. Waldo and his followers emphasized proclaiming and teaching scripture orally in the language of the people to reach a wider audience.
9. After their excommunication in 1184, the "Poor of Lyon" faced increasing opposition from the Church. Later, in 1215, they were formally condemned as heretics, leading to organized persecution.
10. According to Giorgio Turin, the factual details surrounding the famine of 1172 and Waldo's initial response were largely forgotten over time within Waldensian communities. These facts were often supplanted by myths that preserved the memory of Waldo's compassion for the poor.



#### **IV. Essay Format Questions:**

1. Analyze the significance of Luke 18:18-23 in understanding Peter Waldo's conversion and the foundational principles of the early Waldensian movement. Consider both the immediate impact on Waldo and its broader implications for his followers.
2. Discuss the social, economic, and religious context of 12th-century Lyon and how these factors might have contributed to both Peter Waldo's conversion and the initial reception of his teachings.
3. Evaluate the challenges and motivations behind Waldo's decision to commission the translation of the Bible into the vernacular. What does this action reveal about his beliefs and his understanding of religious authority?
4. Compare and contrast the Catholic Church's initial response to Waldo's actions with their later condemnation of him and his followers. What factors contributed to this shift in perspective and the subsequent persecution?
5. Examine the role of historical memory and myth-making in the Waldensian tradition, as suggested by Giorgio Turin. Why might the specific details of Waldo's conversion have been altered or replaced over time, and what purpose did these narratives serve?

## V. Glossary of Key Terms:

- **Vernacular:** The common, everyday language spoken by the people in a particular region or country.
- **Mercantile Trade:** The business of buying and selling goods on a large scale, often involving long-distance travel and exchange.
- **Lay Leadership:** Leadership roles within a religious organization held by individuals who are not ordained clergy.
- **Catholic Hierarchy:** The formal structure of leadership within the Roman Catholic Church, from the Pope down through bishops and priests.
- **Almsgiving:** The practice of giving money or goods to the poor or needy as an act of charity.
- **Oral Tradition:** The passing down of information, history, and cultural values through spoken word rather than written texts.
- **Excommunication:** A formal act by a religious authority that deprives a person of the rights and privileges of church membership.
- **Heresy:** Beliefs or opinions that contradict the official doctrines of a religious system.
- **Persecution:** Hostility and ill-treatment, especially because of religious or political beliefs.
- **Dole:** A distribution of food, money, or other necessities to the poor on a regular basis.
- **Mammon:** A biblical term, often personified as a deity, associated with greed and the pursuit of wealth.
- **Feast of the Assumption:** A Christian holiday celebrated on August 15th commemorating the belief that God assumed the Virgin Mary into heaven following her death.

## **5. FAQs on Frederick, Waldensians, Session 1, Roots of Waldo's Conversion, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions about the Origins of the Waldensian Movement**

#### **1. Who was Peter Waldo (or Valdez), and what was his background?**

Peter Waldo, or Valdez in French, was a wealthy merchant in Lyon, France, during the late 12th century. He was a well-to-do citizen, a business leader in the mercantile trade, and a devout Christian within the Roman Catholic Church. He was also connected with church leaders in Lyon and may have held a lay leadership role.

#### **2. What pivotal biblical passage significantly influenced Waldo's conversion?**

The Gospel of Luke, chapter 18, specifically the encounter between Jesus and the rich young ruler, profoundly impacted Waldo. The ruler asked what he must do to inherit eternal life, and Jesus responded by saying he should sell all his possessions, distribute the money to the poor, and follow Him. This scripture prompted Waldo to seek a life lived according to this literal interpretation.

#### **3. What specific actions did Waldo take following his interpretation of scripture?**

In 1172, amidst a severe drought and famine, Waldo began to radically alter his lifestyle. He started by giving regular distributions of food and later scattered money to the poor. He also made legal arrangements to provide for his wife and daughters before divesting himself of his wealth and property to live a life of poverty, prioritizing his calling to discipleship.

#### **4. Why did Waldo commission the translation of parts of the Bible into the vernacular?**

Living in a time when scripture was primarily in Latin, a language understood by very few, Waldo desired to read and study the Bible for himself. He commissioned church leaders to translate portions of the scriptures into the common language of the region. This act, though initially unnoticed by the Catholic hierarchy, was driven by his personal pursuit of understanding and living according to biblical teachings.

#### **5. How did the Roman Catholic Church initially react to Waldo and his followers?**

Initially, Waldo's proclamation of scripture in the common language was well-received. However, the Roman Catholic hierarchy eventually perceived the effectiveness of his ministry as a threat. In 1184, Waldo and his followers, known as the Poor of Lyon, were excommunicated. Later, in 1215, they were formally condemned as heretics.

**6. What was the significance of Waldo's focus on oral communication?**

In 12th-century Europe, where illiteracy was widespread, oral tradition was crucial for disseminating knowledge. Waldo and his followers emphasized proclaiming and teaching scripture in the language of the people. This was a significant departure from the Roman Catholic Church's insistence on Latin and made the scriptures more accessible to the general population.

**7. What were some of the consequences faced by Waldo and the Poor of Lyon?**

Following their condemnation by the Catholic Church, Waldo and his followers faced increasing persecution. By the 14th century, the church organized a crusade aimed at eradicating what they considered heresy and eliminating all Waldensian followers.

**8. How did the memory of Waldo's initial actions evolve over time within Waldensian communities?**

Over several centuries of persecution and the passage of time, the specific historical details surrounding Waldo's conversion, particularly the famine of 1172, were largely forgotten. In their place, three separate myths emerged within Waldensian communities across Western Europe. These myths, while not entirely factual, served to interpret and preserve the memory of Waldo's response to the suffering of the poor in Lyon.