

Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6, Out of the Shadows of History – Dispelling Myths Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6, Out of the Shadows of History – Dispelling Myths, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kevin Frederick's lecture explores the history of the Waldensians, focusing on dispelling myths surrounding their origins. **The lecture analyzes two primary origin narratives**, one linked to the teachings of Valdez and another tracing back to Constantine's era, revealing the latter as a later embellishment used by Waldensians during times of persecution. **Frederick highlights the lack of direct historical evidence connecting the Waldensians to earlier figures like Claude of Turin**, while acknowledging parallels in their biblical interpretations. **The creation and revision of Waldensian origin stories**, particularly within *The Book of the Elect*, are attributed to the need for a memorable oral history during intense persecution by the Roman Catholic Church. **Despite these mythic elements**, the lecture underscores the historical reality of Waldo of Lyon as the movement's originator and the Waldensians' enduring commitment to core Christian beliefs, which later resonated with Protestant reformers.

2. 22 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6 – 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).



Frederick_Waldensians_Session06.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6, Out of the Shadows of History – Dispelling Myths

Briefing Document: The Origins and Myths of the Waldensian Movement

Overview: This lecture by Dr. Kevin E. Frederick delves into the historical origins of the Waldensian movement, focusing particularly on dispelling long-held myths surrounding their beginnings. The lecture contrasts these mythical accounts with the more established historical narrative centered on Waldo of Lyon in the 12th century. It also explores the reasons behind the development and persistence of these origin myths, particularly in the context of intense and prolonged persecution by the Roman Catholic Church.

Main Themes and Important Ideas/Facts:

1. Dispelling Mythical Origins:

- **Rejection of Genealogical/Mythic Emphasis:** Dr. Frederick begins by referencing 1 Timothy 1:3-5, emphasizing Paul's warning against focusing on "myths and endless genealogies" over faith in Christ. He applies this to the Waldensian origins, stating that some narratives prioritize "pedigree or feats of accomplishment rather than on a faith grounded in the love of a triune God revealed through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ."
- **The Myth of Constantine's Donation:** The lecture addresses the common Waldensian story linking their origins to a split in the early church following Constantine's alleged donation of half the Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I in the 4th century AD.
- Frederick clarifies that historical scholarship has established the "donation of Constantine was itself a myth," originally created by the Roman Catholic Church in the 8th century to justify its wealth.
- Waldensians later embellished this myth, suggesting an ancient division where a faithful remnant opposed the Roman Church's acceptance of wealth and power. They claimed "the Roman Pontiffs are not the successors of the Apostle Peter but of Constantine."
- This modified myth portrayed a split where Sylvester accepted the donation while a companion refused, with the "greater part of the church fell into evil while a

smaller part of the church stayed in the truth." The Waldensians saw themselves as the inheritors of this smaller, faithful group.

- The earliest recorded instance of this myth is found in the "Book of the Elect," written in 1367.

2. The Historical Figure of Waldo of Lyon:

- **Waldo as the Originator:** The lecture affirms that "it has long been recognized that Valdez, Waldo of Lyon, in 1172, was the originator of the Waldensian movement."
- **Evidence for Waldo's Existence:** Sufficient historical data supports his existence and the ministry he began, which emerged from a famine in the Lyon region.

3. Potential Influences: Claude of Turin and Arnold of Brescia:

- **Claude of Turin (9th Century):** Claude, a Roman Catholic bishop, held evangelical views, opposing image worship, advocating justification by faith, and rejecting purgatory, relics, and pilgrimages.
- Frederick notes parallels between Claude's beliefs and Waldensian beliefs, stating, "the parallel deductions of his proclamations as a Roman Catholic bishop with the Christian beliefs of the Waldensians is undeniable."
- However, he emphasizes the lack of "direct historical evidence or documents in existence that provide a direct historical connection between Claude's teachings and the emergence of Waldo." The similarities could stem from both studying the New Testament.
- The modern Waldensian Church in Italy recognizes Claude's biblical witness by naming its publishing house "Claudiana Press."
- Frederick firmly states it is an "unfounded premise" to claim an organized continuous community of believers from Claude's time to Waldo's.
- **Arnold of Brescia (12th Century):** Arnold, a student of Peter Abelard, gathered communities in Lombardy, advocating a Christian life based on discipleship and sharing property, inspired by the early church in the Book of Acts.
- While not directly linked to Claude, Frederick suggests that Claude's beliefs "influenced Arnold and his followers as they developed their own faith communities."

4. Reasons for the Development and Persistence of Myths:

- **Oral Tradition and Loss of Records:** Due to the destruction of Waldensian records by the Roman Catholic Inquisition, oral tradition became crucial for preserving their history. This created opportunities for revisions and embellishments over generations. As Frederick notes, "Routinely throughout its history, the Roman Catholic inquisitors destroyed Waldensian records, writings, and books, making oral tradition even more important to the preservation of the origins of the Waldensians."
- **Need for a Memorizable History:** The "Book of the Elect" was composed with brevity and rhythm, suggesting it was "produced deliberately for memorization" and oral transmission to scattered Waldensians.
- **Justification for Beliefs and Practices:** The myths, particularly the Constantine narrative, served to "justify the adoption of a vow of poverty and chastity along with the call to preach," central to the Waldensian itinerant preachers.
- **Sustaining Faith During Persecution:** The narrative of being the "true remnant of the Church" provided strength and validation during centuries of persecution by the Roman Catholic Church. Peter Biller is quoted as saying that history was used "to console believers during the suffering and hopelessness of the persecution."
- **Revisionist History:** The "Book of the Elect" itself underwent revisions, as seen in the evolving accounts of "Valdes" (later "Peter Valdes") and his relationship to the early church and Constantine. This highlights how the origin stories were adapted over time.

5. The Impact of Persecution:

- **Inquisition and Crusades:** The Waldensians faced intense persecution, beginning with being branded as heretics in 1215 and the subsequent actions of the Inquisition, which used torture and execution (often burning at the stake). Pope Innocent VIII called for a crusade against them in the 1480s.
- **Devastating Consequences:** Persecutions led to confiscation of property, torture, executions, and the forced removal of children to be raised in Catholic doctrine.
- **Strengthening Faith:** The myths helped sustain the Waldensians' faith and their sense of connection to the early church during these trials.

6. Waldensians and the Protestant Reformation:

- **Protestant Recognition:** During the Reformation, Protestant scholars saw the Waldensians as their "religious forebears" and "preservers of the true church," adopting aspects of the origin myths.
- **Early Waldensian Historiography:** 17th-century Waldensian historians like John Léger and Samuel Moreland attempted to document their history, relying heavily on oral tradition, which was an accepted historical method at the time.

7. Legacy and Modern Understanding:

- **Survival into Modern Times:** The Waldensian movement is recognized as the only Christian movement deemed heretical by the Roman Catholic Church that has survived to the present day.
- **Focus on Core Christian Teachings:** The Waldensians, guided by their preachers (Barba), effectively communicated the teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, emphasizing "love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith."
- **Enduring Relevance:** Dr. Frederick concludes by stating that the essence of these beliefs and practices remains central to a faithful Christian witness today.

Quote:

- "To do so was to try to establish one's credibility based on pedigree or feats of accomplishment rather than on a faith grounded in the love of a triune God revealed through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ." (Describing the dangers of focusing on myths and genealogies).
- "It is worth noting that historical scholarship has determined that the story of the donation of Constantine was itself a myth." (Highlighting the historical inaccuracy of a key origin story).
- "Slowly, the greater part of the church fell into evil while a smaller part of the church stayed in the truth." (Illustrating the core of the modified Constantine myth).
- "It has long been recognized that Valdez, Waldo of Lyon, in 1172, was the originator of the Waldensian movement." (Presenting the established historical view).

- "The aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith." (Quoting 1 Timothy and summarizing the core Waldensian focus).

Conclusion:

Dr. Frederick's lecture provides a valuable overview of the Waldensian origins, carefully distinguishing between historically supported facts and the myths that developed over time. He argues that while the myths, particularly those surrounding Constantine, are not historically accurate, they played a crucial role in maintaining the Waldensian identity, providing solace, and justifying their beliefs and practices during centuries of intense persecution. The lecture ultimately emphasizes the importance of focusing on the core Christian message of faith, love, and a pure conscience, which has been central to the Waldensian witness throughout history.

4. Study Guide: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6, Out of the Shadows of History – Dispelling Myths

The Waldensians: Origins and Myths

Study Guide

I. Introduction to the Source Material:

- Understand the context of Dr. Frederick's lecture as part of a series on Waldensian history.
- Grasp the central theme of the lecture: dispelling myths surrounding the origins of the Waldensian movement.
- Note the scriptural basis from 1 Timothy 1:3-5 and Paul's warning against myths and genealogies that distract from faith in Christ.

II. The Myth of Constantine's Donation:

- Define the myth of Constantine's donation: the alleged 4th-century transfer of half the Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I.
- Recognize the historical consensus that this donation was a fabrication originating in the 8th century by the Roman Catholic Church to justify its wealth.
- Explain how Waldensian believers later embellished this myth, starting in the late 13th century.
- Understand the Waldensian interpretation of the myth: a symbolic representation of an early division within the church where a faithful remnant rejected the acquisition of wealth and power by Rome.
- Trace the evolution of the myth as depicted in the "Book of the Elect" (1367), highlighting the idea of a split between Sylvester I and those who maintained a commitment to poverty.

III. Historical Origins of the Waldensian Movement:

- Identify Peter Valdes (Waldo of Lyon) in 1172 as the recognized originator of the Waldensian movement.
- Acknowledge the historical evidence supporting his existence and ministry, which emerged following a famine in the Lyon region.

IV. Potential Influences on Waldensian Beliefs:

- Explore the possible connection to Claude of Turin (9th-century Catholic bishop):
- Understand Claude's evangelical beliefs and his opposition to practices like the worship of images, belief in purgatory, veneration of relics, and the efficacy of pilgrimages.
- Note the lack of direct historical evidence linking Claude to Waldo.
- Consider the plausibility of Claude's ideas being passed down orally in the Piedmont region.
- Recognize the alternative explanation that parallel beliefs could have arisen from independent study of the New Testament.
- Examine the influence of Arnold of Brescia (12th century):
- Understand his efforts to create faith communities based on early church practices (as seen in the Book of Acts) and a rejection of the Roman Catholic Church's wealth.
- Note the temporal proximity and geographical overlap between Arnold's activities and the later emergence of Waldo.

V. Reasons for the Creation and Revision of Myths:

- Understand the importance of oral tradition for the Waldensians due to the destruction of their records by the Roman Catholic Inquisition.
- Explain how the "Book of the Elect" served as a memorable narrative to preserve Waldensian history and identity.
- Analyze the function of these myths in:
- Justifying the Waldensian emphasis on poverty and preaching.
- Encouraging steadfastness during persecution by drawing parallels to the early church.
- Providing a sense of historical continuity with the apostolic age.
- Trace the revisions of the Constantine donation myth in later editions of the "Book of the Elect," including the introduction of "Peter Valdes" as a companion of Sylvester.

- Recognize how these revisions aimed to strengthen the perceived historical link between the Waldensians and the early church.

VI. The Impact of Persecution on Waldensian Identity:

- Understand the historical context of persecution following the branding of Waldensians as heretics in 1215.
- Describe the role of the Inquisition in suppressing the Waldensian movement.
- Note the extreme measures taken by the Church, including confiscation of property, torture, execution, and the forced conversion of children.
- Analyze how the myths provided solace and strengthened faith during these periods of intense persecution.

VII. Waldensians and the Protestant Reformation:

- Understand how Protestant scholars in the early Reformation viewed the Waldensians as precursors to their own movement.
- Note the efforts of early Waldensian historians like John Léger and Samuel Moreland to document their history, blending oral tradition with emerging historical methodologies.

VIII. Conclusion:

- Reiterate the lecture's main point: the Waldensian movement, while surrounded by origin myths, has a demonstrable historical basis in the ministry of Peter Valdes.
- Emphasize the enduring legacy of the Waldensians as a Christian movement that pre-dates the Reformation and their focus on the core teachings of Jesus and the Apostle Paul.

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 complete sentences each.

1. According to Dr. Frederick, what was the primary purpose of Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 1:3-5?
2. What is the historical consensus regarding the Donation of Constantine, and what was its original purpose?

3. How did Waldensian believers modify the myth of the Donation of Constantine, and what was the significance of this modification?
4. Who is historically recognized as the founder of the Waldensian movement, and in what century did his ministry begin?
5. What were some of the key theological beliefs of Claude of Turin that resonate with later Waldensian thought?
6. What is the "Book of the Elect," and what primary function did it serve for the Waldensian community?
7. According to the lecture, why did the Waldensians rely heavily on oral tradition to preserve their history?
8. Describe one way in which the myth of Waldensian origins was revised in later editions of the "Book of the Elect."
9. What impact did the Roman Catholic Inquisition have on the Waldensian people and their historical records?
10. How did the myths surrounding their origins help the Waldensians endure centuries of persecution?

Answer Key

1. Paul's warning in 1 Timothy 1:3-5 aimed to instruct new converts to remain focused on their relationship with Christ and avoid being distracted by myths and genealogies that promote speculation rather than faith. He emphasized that true instruction leads to love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.
2. Historical scholarship has determined that the Donation of Constantine was a myth created by the Roman Catholic Church in the 8th century AD. Its original purpose was to justify the Church's acquisition of significant wealth and property in the face of criticism.
3. Waldensian believers embellished the myth of the Donation of Constantine to suggest an ancient division within the early church where a faithful remnant opposed the Roman Catholic Church's acceptance of wealth and power. They portrayed this remnant as the true church, in contrast to Rome, which had supposedly strayed from Christ's servant ministry.
4. Peter Valdes, also known as Waldo of Lyon, is historically recognized as the founder of the Waldensian movement. His ministry began in the 12th century,

around the year 1172, following a significant famine in the region surrounding Lyon.

5. Claude of Turin opposed the worship of holy images, preached justification by faith, disclaimed purgatory and the worship of relics, and rejected the efficacy of pilgrimages. These biblically grounded beliefs show parallels with later Waldensian theological stances.
6. The "Book of the Elect," written in 1367, was a short, poetic document that served as a written account of Waldensian history designed for memorization and oral transmission. It aimed to provide an easily recited narrative of their origins and encourage steadfastness during persecution.
7. The Waldensians relied heavily on oral tradition because the Roman Catholic inquisitors routinely destroyed their written records, writings, and books as evidence of heresy after trials. This made oral transmission crucial for preserving their history and identity across generations.
8. Later revisions of the "Book of the Elect" introduced "Peter Valdes" not as the 12th-century founder but as a companion of the 14th-century Pope Sylvester who preserved the true church at the time of Constantine's donation. This revision aimed to create a longer and more direct lineage back to the early church.
9. The Roman Catholic Inquisition systematically persecuted the Waldensians, confiscating their property, subjecting them to torture, and often executing them by burning. They also destroyed Waldensian historical records in an effort to eradicate the movement and suppress its history.
10. The myths surrounding their origins provided the Waldensians with a sense of being the true remnant of the early church, directly connected to Christ and his apostles. This belief in the sacredness of their cause and historical continuity provided crucial spiritual sustenance and resilience in the face of relentless persecution.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the historical context and motivations behind the creation and subsequent modifications of the myth of Constantine's Donation by Waldensian believers. How did this myth serve to shape their identity and understanding of their place in Christian history?
2. Compare and contrast the potential influences of Claude of Turin and Arnold of Brescia on the development of Waldensian beliefs and practices. To what extent can a direct historical link be established, and what alternative explanations exist for the parallels in their teachings?
3. Discuss the significance of oral tradition in preserving Waldensian history and identity, particularly in light of the systematic destruction of their written records by the Roman Catholic Church. How did documents like the "Book of the Elect" bridge the gap between oral and written history?
4. Evaluate the impact of the Roman Catholic Inquisition and subsequent persecutions on the Waldensian movement. How did these periods of intense oppression shape their theological perspectives, communal practices, and narratives of origin?
5. Examine the relationship between the Waldensians and the Protestant Reformation. Why did some Protestant scholars view the Waldensians as their religious forebears, and how does modern historical scholarship assess the connections between these movements?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Waldensians:** A Christian movement that originated in the 12th century with Peter Valdes of Lyon, emphasizing poverty, preaching, and a focus on biblical teachings.
- **Myth of Constantine's Donation:** A fabricated story from the 8th century claiming that the 4th-century Roman Emperor Constantine gifted temporal power over the Western Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I.
- **Book of the Elect:** A short, poetic text written in 1367 that presented a Waldensian understanding of their origins, emphasizing a split in the early church at the time of Constantine's donation.
- **Valdes (Waldo of Lyon):** The 12th-century founder of the Waldensian movement, who advocated for a life of poverty and the translation and preaching of the Bible in the vernacular.
- **Claude of Turin:** A 9th-century Roman Catholic bishop known for his evangelical beliefs and opposition to practices such as the worship of images and belief in purgatory.
- **Arnold of Brescia:** A 12th-century religious reformer who advocated for a return to the practices of the early church and a rejection of the wealth and power of the Roman Catholic Church.
- **Inquisition:** An ecclesial court system established by the Roman Catholic Church, particularly from the 13th century onwards, to identify and prosecute heresy.
- **Heresy:** Beliefs or doctrines that contradict the official teachings of a religious authority, in this context, the Roman Catholic Church.
- **Barba:** The Waldensian preachers or pastors who played a crucial role in leading their communities and preserving their faith through teaching and example.
- **Historiography:** The writing of history; the study of historical writing and interpretation.

5. FAQs on Frederick, Waldensians, Session 6, Out of the Shadows of History – Dispelling Myths, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions About the Origins and History of the Waldensians

1. According to the lecture, what are the two main alternative accounts regarding the origin of the Waldensian movement, and what is the central figure in these accounts?

The lecture identifies two main alternative accounts regarding the origins of the Waldensian movement. The first involves the teachings of Claude of Turin, a maverick Catholic bishop from the 9th century. The second, and more historically connected, narrative centers on the life and ministry of Valdez (Waldo) of Lyon, who initiated the movement around 1172. While the Claude narrative suggests a much earlier, continuous opposition to the Roman Catholic Church, the Valdez narrative focuses on a 12th-century origin stemming from his actions and teachings.

2. What is the myth of the Donation of Constantine, and how did it become intertwined with early Waldensian narratives?

The myth of the Donation of Constantine is a fabricated story, originally created by the Roman Catholic Church in the 8th century, claiming that Emperor Constantine in the 4th century AD gifted half of the Roman Empire to Pope Sylvester I. Centuries later, Waldensian believers embellished this myth to support their belief in an ancient division within the early church. They posited that when Sylvester accepted this wealth, a faithful remnant opposed this move, emphasizing Christ's servant ministry and vows of poverty. This modified myth served to provide a historical basis for their separation from and opposition to the wealthy and powerful Roman Catholic Church, suggesting they were the continuation of a purer, earlier form of Christianity.

3. Who was Claude of Turin, and what were some of his key theological positions? Despite the parallels, why is it considered an "unfounded premise" to directly link him to the 12th-century Waldensians?

Claude of Turin was an outspoken evangelical Christian leader who served as a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church in the 9th century. His key theological positions included opposition to the worship of holy images, advocating for their removal from churches, preaching justification by faith, rejecting purgatory, the worship of relics, and the efficacy of pilgrimages. Despite these parallels with later Waldensian beliefs, there is no direct

historical evidence or documentation connecting Claude's teachings to the emergence of Waldo and his followers in the 12th century. The similarities in their beliefs are more likely attributed to both drawing their theological understanding from the same primary source: the New Testament gospels and the letters of Paul. Therefore, asserting a continuous, organized community of believers from Claude's time to Waldo's is considered unfounded.

4. Why did the Waldensians develop and perpetuate myths about their origins, particularly the modified Donation of Constantine story? What purpose did these stories serve for the community?

The Waldensians developed and perpetuated myths about their origins, such as the modified Donation of Constantine story, primarily to provide themselves with a sense of historical continuity with the early, "pure" church and to justify their opposition to the Roman Catholic Church's wealth and power. These stories served several important purposes for the community. They acted as easily memorized oral histories in a time when Waldensian written records were often destroyed during persecutions. They offered a narrative of an unbroken lineage of true believers stretching back to the apostles, bolstering their legitimacy and providing spiritual comfort and resilience in the face of relentless persecution. These myths helped to solidify their identity as the faithful remnant and sustained their witness through centuries of adversity.

5. How did the intense persecution by the Roman Catholic Church, particularly through the Inquisition, influence the development and preservation of Waldensian history and origin stories?

The intense persecution by the Roman Catholic Church, especially through the Inquisition starting in the 13th century, significantly influenced the development and preservation of Waldensian history. The systematic destruction of Waldensian writings and the constant threat of violence made oral tradition a crucial means of preserving their history and beliefs. This environment also fostered the development and revision of origin stories, like those found in the *Book of the Elect*, to provide a sense of historical depth, divine legitimacy, and spiritual encouragement to a community facing existential threats. The persecutions reinforced the need for a narrative that positioned them as the true successors of the early church enduring similar trials.

6. What was the *Book of the Elect*, and what role did it play in shaping Waldensian identity and historical understanding?

The *Book of the Elect* was a short, poetic document written in 1367 that played a significant role in shaping Waldensian identity and historical understanding. It was composed in a way that facilitated memorization and oral transmission, providing a readily accessible account of their origins, particularly emphasizing a split in the church at the time of Constantine's donation. The book served to justify Waldensian practices like the vow of poverty and preaching, and it encouraged followers to remain steadfast during persecution by drawing parallels with the early Church's trials. It was instrumental in maintaining a sense of shared history and a belief in their role as the faithful remnant of the true church, particularly when written records were scarce due to destruction by inquisitors.

7. How did Protestant scholars during the Reformation view the Waldensians and their origin stories? Why were the Waldensians seen as significant by early Protestants?

During the Protestant Reformation, many Protestant scholars viewed the Waldensians as their religious forebears, adopting some of the myths surrounding their origins. Protestants saw the Waldensians as pioneers of their own faith, identifying them as a group that had preserved the true church and maintained biblical principles for centuries prior to the Reformation. This connection provided early Protestantism with a sense of historical precedent and legitimacy, suggesting that their movement was not entirely new but rather a continuation of a long-standing tradition of Christian dissent against the perceived corruption of the Roman Catholic Church.

8. Despite the mythical elements surrounding their origins, what is the enduring historical significance of the Waldensian movement, according to the lecture?

Despite the presence of myths in their history, the enduring historical significance of the Waldensian movement lies in its status as the only Christian movement deemed heretical by the Roman Catholic Church that has survived into modern times. The Waldensians, guided by their preachers (the Barba), effectively communicated the teachings of Jesus to the laity before the Protestant Reformation and maintained a faithful biblical witness, emphasizing love, a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Their resilience in the face of centuries of relentless persecution and their focus on core Christian principles demonstrate a significant and lasting impact on Christian history.