

Standing Strong for Bible Truth



SABBATH—APRIL 20

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Daniel 7:23–25; Jude 1:3, 4; Acts 5:28–32; *The Great Controversy*, chapters 4–6.

MEMORY VERSE: “Moses lifted up the snake in the desert. In the same way, the Son of Man must also be lifted up. Then everyone who believes may have eternal [ever-lasting] life in him” (John 3:14, 15, NIV).

“How can I say anything evil against my King who saved me?”

IZMIR is a city in modern Turkey. In Bible times, Izmir used to be the city of Smyrna. John talks about Smyrna in the Book of Revelation. 100,000 people lived in Smyrna during the first century (years A.D. 1–100) and in the second century (years A.D. 101–200). Smyrna was a wealthy city. The people of Smyrna were very loyal to the king of Rome.

Each year, the leaders of Smyrna commanded all the citizens of the city to burn sweet-smelling spices and offer the perfume to the Roman gods. In the second century A.D., a strong community of Christians lived in Smyrna. One leader of the church in Smyrna was named Polycarp. Polycarp was burned alive in Smyrna's public square because he refused to burn spices to the Roman gods. Right before the city leaders burned Polycarp, they asked him a final time to give up His faith in Jesus. Polycarp answered, “I have served Jesus for 86 years. He never did me any wrong. How can I say anything evil against my King who saved me?”

In ages past, men and women chose to die for their faith. They refused to reject Jesus to save their lives. Their stories give us courage and hope. This week, we will look at important rules that caused these Christians to stay loyal to Jesus, even when they were killed.

RESPECT GOD (Daniel 7:23–25)

Read Daniel 7:23–25 and Revelation 12:6, 14. What time in history do these verses talk about?

Whenever God's people are loyal to Him, Satan gets angry. He then works with his followers to attack God's people. Daniel wrote about a time faraway in the future from his time when popes would fight a "war against God's holy people" (Daniel 7:21, ERV) and "hurt and kill" them (Daniel 7:25, ERV). John also talks about this time. John tells us that, at that time, God's true church hid in the desert. There, God took care of His church "for three and a half years" (Revelation 12:14, ERV). Revelation 12:6 adds, "The woman [a symbol for God's church] ran away into the desert to a place that God had prepared [made ready] for her" (ERV). How did God take care of His people in the desert? He "fed" them Bible truth. Bible truth kept God's people strong during this long, dark time in history when popes controlled both church and kings.

Yes, God made a place of safety for His people during this dark time. During the worst of times, God always makes a safe place for His loyal followers. During times of terrible suffering, God's people always can rest in God's love and care for them. (Read Psalm 46.)

Both the 1,260 years in Revelation 12:6 and the 3½ years in Revelation 12:14 talk about the same time in history. (If we do the math, then 3½ years x 360 days in a Jewish year = 1,260 days.) Special messages about time in the Bible often use symbols or word pictures. In the Books of Daniel and Revelation, one day is the same as one real year. This important rule about special time in the Bible is named 'the day-year rule.' The Bible talks about the day-year rule in Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:6.

When did the 1,260 days start? This time period started when the Romans pushed the Ostrogoths out of Rome, in A.D. 538. The Ostrogoths were foreigners. After the Romans kicked out the Ostrogoths, a dark time in history started. This time is named the Dark Ages. Many Christians died during the Dark Ages because they obeyed the Bible. Their death is only a rest until Jesus comes back. The Dark Ages continued 1,260 years, until A.D. 1798. In 1798, the French general Berthier removed the pope from Rome.

How have Daniel and Revelation made your faith strong?



Many Christians died during the Dark Ages because they obeyed the Bible.

LIGHT DEFEATS THE DARK (Jude 1:3, 4)

What warning do we read about in Jude 1:3, 4? How does this warning help us understand what happened to the Christian church later on in history?

The Book of Jude was written sometime before A.D. 65. Jude wrote this book to loyal Christians. Jude encourages them “to fight hard for the faith that God gave his holy people” (Jude 1:3, ERV). Jude warns them of the danger they are in: “Some sinful [evil] men have come into your church without anyone knowing it” (Jude 1:4, NLV). Then Jude adds, “They have used the grace [mercy] of our God in the wrong way . . . to do sinful [evil] things” (Jude 1:4, ERV). Jude’s warning was helpful to Christians in the Dark Ages. At that time, false teachings came into the church. Church leaders mixed human ideas with Bible truth.

God had loyal followers in the Dark Ages who stood for Bible truth. These people included the Waldenses, a group of Christians who lived high in the mountains of Europe. The Waldenses believed that Jesus was the only One who could go to God to get help for them. The Waldenses accepted the Bible as the rule book for their lives.



The promised crown of life helped the Waldenses to stay strong when they suffered or died for their faith.

Read Revelation 2:10. What promise does God give in this verse to the ones who die for their faith?

Jesus makes this promise to the church at Smyrna. One of Smyrna’s top gods was Dionysius. Dionysius was the god of wine and crops. When the god’s priests or spiritual leaders died, a crown was put on their heads at their funerals. In Revelation 2:10, John writes about another crown: the crown of life. God will put the crown of life on the heads of His followers who win the fight against Satan.

The crown of life gives courage to God’s followers to die for Him, if needed. The promised crown of life helped the Waldenses to stay strong when they suffered or died for their faith. The Waldenses knew they would see Jesus and live with Him forever. The crown of life also is a promise to us. We may have hard times now. But a crown of life waits for us if we keep our eyes on Jesus.

What encourages you during hard times? What scares you? What promises help you during those times?

COURAGE TO STAND (Acts 5:28–32)

Compare Acts 5:28–32; Ephesians 6:10–12; and Revelation 3:11. What important rule is in these verses?

The Waldenses were loyal to God. They obeyed His commandments. They believed the Bible was the rule book for their lives. They worshiped Jesus, and not the pope. The Waldenses filled their minds with New Testament stories about faith and courage.

With Peter and Jesus' other followers, the Waldenses could say, " 'We must obey God, not men!' " (Acts 5:29, ICB). The Waldenses understood Paul's advice well, "Let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power [strength]" (Ephesians 6:10, Nlrv). They followed Jesus' advice: " 'Hold on to what you have. Then no one will take away your crown' " (Revelation 3:11, Nlrv). The Waldenses refused to obey the teachings of Rome. These brave men and women of faith had the courage to stand for Bible truth.

The Waldenses were one of the first groups to translate the Bible into their own language. Jean Leger was a Waldensian man who made copies of the Bible. Leger wrote a story about his work. He told how the Waldenses worked together in teams to make handwritten copies of the Bible. The Waldenses worked in secret. They copied the Bible in their mountain communities in the North of Italy and in the South of France. Waldensian parents taught their children at an early age to remember large parts of the Bible. Later, when these children grew up, many of them traveled across Europe as merchants. They shared Bible truth with their customers. Some Waldensian youths went to the universities. Whenever these young men got the chance, they shared Bible truth with other students. At the right time, they gave away precious copies of the Bible. Many of these brave young men were killed for sharing Bible truth or handwritten parts of the Bible. The Waldenses didn't understand every Bible teaching. But they shared the Bible truth that they knew and copies of books of the Bible with people whenever they got the chance. Their sharing of the Bible kept its truth alive for hundreds of years.

In Proverbs 4:18, Solomon says that people who live right are the same as a shining light. How can we be the same as the Waldenses and let the light of Jesus shine in our own communities?



The Waldenses shared the Bible truth that they knew and copies of books of the Bible with people whenever they got the chance.

JOHN WYCLIFFE (Psalm 19:7–11)

What did both David and Jeremiah believe about the Bible? Read Psalm 19:7–11; Psalm 119:140; Psalm 119:162; and Jeremiah 15:16 for the answers. How did these ideas about the Bible help start the Protestant Reformation? The Protestant Reformation was the time during the 1500s in Europe when men made big changes to the Catholic religion. These men rejected the false teachings of the Catholic church. The changes they made led to the start of the Protestant churches.

The leaders of the Protestant Reformation loved the Bible. They studied the Bible because they wanted to do so.

As these men studied the Bible, the Holy Spirit changed them. “John Wycliffe was one of the first leaders of the Protestant Reformation. Wycliffe got an education from the Bible that changed his life. The Bible made Wycliffe a better man. When we work hard to understand Bible truth, we will become smart and wise, too. Also, when we study the Bible, our every thought and feeling will be improved. The Bible makes us patient. The Bible helps make us holy and to be the same as God in our hearts. The Bible gives us courage. Nothing else we study can cause us to feel this way. Bible study helps us to do more and better things. When we carefully study the Bible, we come into contact with God’s own mind. If people studied the Bible, they would have stronger minds and hearts. We can’t get this education from studying human ideas.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 94, adapted.



Wycliffe spent his life translating the Bible into the English language because the Bible had changed his life, and he wanted to share it.

What advice did Paul give to Timothy about sharing Bible truth? Read 2 Timothy 2:1–3 for the answer.

Before John Wycliffe’s time, very little of the Bible was translated in the English language. Wycliffe spent his life translating the Bible into the English language for two reasons. First, the Bible changed his life. Second, Wycliffe’s heart was filled with Jesus’ love. So, he wanted to share Bible truth with other people.

After Wycliffe died, the pope ordered men to dig up Wycliffe’s bones and burn them. The men threw Wycliffe’s ashes in a river. The water carried his ashes far away into the sea. In the same way, Bible truth went far and wide because of Wycliffe’s work.

FILLED WITH HOPE (John 5:24)

What was the experience of loyal Christians during the Middle Ages? How were they part of the worldwide war between good and evil?

What helped the Waldenses to trust the Lord when they were attacked for their faith? What gave Huss, Jerome, Tyndale, Latimer, and other Protestants courage to stay loyal to God during the Middle Ages? Many of these men and women were killed with the sword or burned alive. Faith in the promises of God kept these men and women strong. They believed Jesus' promise: " 'You will live because I live' " (John 14:19, ERV). God gave them the strength they needed to die with courage. These Protestants felt joyful because God judged them worthy to suffer and die for their Lord. Their faith was a powerful witness to other people.

The Protestants in the Middle Ages looked past their suffering to God's promises about the future. These men and women knew that Jesus won the fight against death when He woke up from the dead. They held onto Jesus' promises in the Bible and won the fight, too.

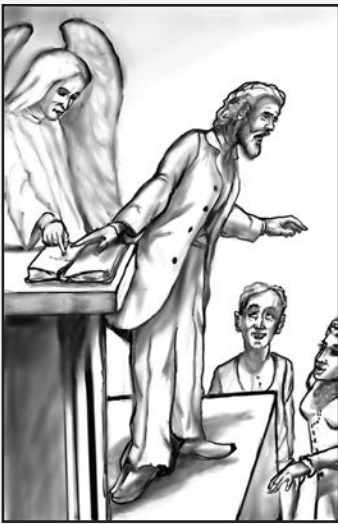
Read the promises from Jesus in John 5:24; John 11:25, 26; and 1 John 5:11–13. What hope do these promises give you? How do these promises help us during hard times?

John Huss was thrown in prison for many months. But his faith stayed strong. The prison was cold and damp. While Huss was there, he got a fever that almost killed him. "God's mercy kept Huss alive. In Huss's final weeks of suffering before he died, peace from heaven filled his heart. He wrote to a friend during this time: 'I write this letter from prison with my hand in chains. Tomorrow, I expect to die. . . . With God's help we will meet again in the peace of the future life. Then you will learn about the mercy God showed me. He supported me in every test and hard time.' . . . In his gloomy prison, Huss saw that faith in God will win the fight against evil in the end."—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 107, 108, adapted.

Paul's warning has special meaning for us today: "Let us hold firmly to the hope that we have confessed. We can trust God to do what he promised" (Hebrews 10:23, ICB). God's promises kept His people strong in the past. So, His promises keep us strong today.



"In his gloomy prison, Huss saw that faith in God will win the fight against evil in the end."



God gave the Protestant leaders as much truth as His people could accept.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “God gave many Bible truths to the men He chose as His servants. God showed them the false teachings of Rome. But God didn’t give His servants all the Bible truth at one time. God used these men to lead people away from the false teachings of Rome and into Bible truth. Many things got in the way of their work. But God continued to lead His servants. He gave them as much Bible truth as they could accept. These men weren’t ready to get all the Bible truth at one time. What if God had given them all the light of Bible truth at one time? What would have happened? They would have turned away from it, the same as people turn away from the bright sun after living for a long time in the dark. So, God gave the Protestant leaders His Bible truth little by little. He gave them as much as His people could accept. In the ages to come, other loyal workers followed these Protestant leaders. These new workers led God’s people into more Bible truth. The workers helped change the spiritual lives of church members and to make them better people.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 103, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Why does God give us Bible truth little by little, and not all at one time? How does this important rule help us to understand the best way to share Bible truth with other people?
- ② How does new Bible truth connect with Bible truth that we already accept and believe? Why must new Bible truth never go against old “light” or truth?
- ③ Wherever you may live, the ideas, habits, and beliefs of the community around you will in some way go against Bible teachings. What are some of these ideas, habits, and beliefs in your community? What do you think is the best way to solve this problem? How do you think the church should solve it? How can we be good citizens in this life while staying loyal to our beliefs and Bible truth?
- ④ How does John Huss’s letter in Thursday’s study change your thinking today? What do you like the most about Huss’s letter?

A TALE ABOUT TWO NEIGHBORS

Mussa's religion taught that it is wrong to raise pigs for sale. But Mussa worked as a pig farmer.

Nicolonaga's religion taught that it is wrong to divorce for any reason except cheating. But Nicolonaga married three times. Also, at separate times, he lived with three different women the same as wives without marrying any of them.

Mussa and Nicolonaga were neighbors in Mozambique. The two men's lives didn't match their religious beliefs. But God had a plan for them.

One of Mussa's pigs escaped and ran into Nicolonaga's vegetable garden. The pig destroyed many of Nicolonaga's plants.

Nicolonaga was angry. He got into a fistfight with Mussa. Nicolonaga won the fight. Mussa limped away. He was covered with blood and bruises. But Mussa refused to give up the fight. He promised to get revenge with witchcraft. Mussa warned Nicolonaga, "You have 30 days to get ready to die."

The next day, Nicolonaga woke up feeling very ill. He told his Adventist friends about Mussa's promise to get revenge. Nicolonaga's friends belonged to the church where he used to worship.

Nicolonaga continued to get worse. He grew worried. After 15 days, he asked church members to pray for him. The pastor brought a prayer team to Nicolonaga's house.

But Nicolonaga didn't get better. Another week passed. Nicolonaga didn't have much time left. The pastor told church members to pray and fast for Nicolonaga for a whole night. Fasting is a short time when you don't eat any food.

Early the next morning, Mussa knocked on the door of the pastor's house. He told the pastor an amazing story about how his gods fought Nicolonaga's God, and Nicolonaga's God won. Mussa said he didn't want to kill Nicolonaga anymore. Mussa wanted to become a Christian. He said, "I want to worship Nicolonaga's God."

Nicolonaga got well. Both he and Mussa joined a class to get baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Today, both men are powerful leaders for good in their community.

The pastor of their church, Nelson A. Quenesse, said, "God is all-powerful. He answers the prayers of the people who seek Him in faith. 'Without faith no one can please God. Anyone who comes to God must believe that he is real and that he rewards those [people] who truly [keep on trying] want to find him' (Hebrews 11:6, ERV)."

Thank you for your Sabbath School offerings that help our church share the Good News worldwide and in Mozambique.

INSIDE
Story

by ANDREW MCCHESENEY



One of Mussa's pigs escaped and ran into Nicolonaga's vegetable garden. The pig destroyed many of Nicolonaga's plants.