

Year at a Glance	
Nov 9-Dec 14	Early Church Age
Jan 4-Feb 8	Post-Nicene Age
Feb 15-Mar 22	Medieval Age
Mar 29-May 10	Reformation Age
May 17-May 31	Great Awakening to Today

Medieval Age	
February 8 -March 22	
Date	Topic & Reading
Feb 15	“Gregory the Great” (chapter 17) “Charlemagne and Christendom” (chapter 18)
Feb 22	“The Papacy and the Crusader” (chapter 19)
Mar 1	MISSIONS SUNDAY
Mar 8	“Scholasticism” (chapter 20) “The Monastic Ideal” (chapter 21)
Mar 15	“The Decline of the Papacy” (chapter 22)
Mar 22	“Wyclif and Hus” (chapter 23)

Last week we studied **The Decline of the Papacy**, looking at how a series of crises in the fourteenth century weakened the authority of the medieval church and prepared the way for later reform movements.

We began by examining the major crises that shook medieval Europe. The **Great Famine of 1315–1317** and the devastating **Black Death of 1347–1351** brought widespread suffering and uncertainty, killing an enormous portion of the population and deeply affecting society, the economy, and even the clergy. Many people searched for **explanations**: some turning to **repentance** and prayer, others to **superstition, extreme religious movements, or reckless living**. These events created an atmosphere of instability that caused many to question long-standing institutions and explanations.

We then looked at the **political and institutional pressures that weakened papal authority**. The **Hundred Years’ War** strengthened emerging national governments and fostered growing nationalism, which reduced the influence of a universal papal authority. **Conflicts between popes and powerful monarchs**—especially the dramatic confrontation between Boniface VIII and Philip IV of France—further damaged the prestige of the papacy. These tensions eventually led to the **Avignon Papacy** (Babylonian Captivity) and later the **Great Schism**, when multiple rival popes divided Europe and severely undermined confidence in church leadership.

Finally, we considered the **intellectual challenges** of the period. Thinkers like **William of Ockham** questioned the philosophical framework that had supported much medieval theology, while writers such as **Dante** openly criticized corruption within the church. By the early 1400s the authority of the papacy had been significantly weakened by political conflict, social upheaval, and intellectual critique. **The stage was now being set for reformers who would soon ask an even deeper question: not simply how the church should be governed, but whether Scripture rather than the papacy should be the church’s final authority.**

## BRINGING TRUTH TO A 14TH CENTURY IN CRISIS: WYCLIFFE AND HUS<sup>1</sup>

*“Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (2 Timothy 4:2)*

### Introduction

“Lord, give me grace to hold righteousness in all things that I may lead a clean and blessed life and prudently flee evil and that I may understand the treacherous and deceitful falseness of the devil. Make me mild, peaceable, courteous, and temperate. And make me steadfast and strong. Also, Lord, give Thou to me that I be quiet in words and that I speak what is appropriate. Amen” (Wycliffe).

There is a well-known statue of Martin Luther in Worms, marking where he made his famous stand. Surrounding that statue are four earlier figures—men who lived before the Reformation but whose teaching helped prepare the way for it. These are often called the **pre-Reformers**. One of them is Peter Waldo, whom we have already studied. The others are John Wycliffe, Jan Hus, and Girolamo Savonarola.

Today we turn our attention to Wycliffe and Hus. Wycliffe has been called the **“morning star of the Reformation,”** but this morning we will call the **“morning stars”** because their lives and teaching anticipated what God would later do more fully in the sixteenth century.



*Luther Monument at Worms, Germany*



Waldo (France) Savonarola (Italy) Hus (Bohemia) Wycliffe (England)

<sup>1</sup> Much of this lesson is derived from Lecture 32, Wycliffe and Hus, by Dr. David Calhoun.

i. John Wycliffe

c. 1330	Born in Yorkshire		Queen Mother urged council not to bring judgment against Wycliffe
1337	One Hundred Years War Begins		Wrote <i>De Ecclesia</i> on the nature of the church
1345	Entered Oxford		
1360	Master of Balliol College	1379	Wrote against doctrine of Transubstantiation
1362	English officially became the national language [after French dominating since the Norman Invasion of 1066]	1381	Peasants' Revolt
1366	Becomes one of the king's chaplains	1382	Blackfriar's Synod summoned by Archbishop Courtenay to consider Wycliffe's views; views pronounced as heresies
1372	Doctor of Theology		Forbidden to teach at Oxford
1374	Among commissioners to Bruges negotiating problems of papal & royal jurisdiction		Retired to pastoral living at Lutterworth
1377	Pope Gregory sent bulls to England condemning Wycliffe's writings as dangerous to Church & State. Began sending out poor preachers (Lollards)		Stroke left him partially paralyzed, but work continued
1378	Lambeth Palace—Wycliffe explained his views to the archbishop and bishops	1384	Second stroke and death
		1415	Council of Constance posthumously condemned Wycliffe
		1428	Wycliffe's remains disinterred, burnt to ashes, & cast into the River Swift

- a. "The Jewel of Oxford" - Modern scholars are just discovering what a scholar Wycliffe really was (philosopher; theologian). **His works were all in Latin.** Oxford was the leading university at this time and Wycliffe was its leading scholar. His teaching was very different:
- i. **All authority**—secular and ecclesiastical—is a gift of God and can be forfeited.
  - ii. The **Pope** is the spiritual leader of the church in so far as he acts like that representative. If not, he is antichrist.

### iii. Christ is the true head of the church.

#### iv. Church and State

- i. Wycliffe wrote that all rule or dominion, both of the State and the Church, comes from God. The State holds temporal power while the church has spiritual authority, but both hold their authority from God.
- ii. According to God's law outlined in Scriptures, the **church is not to hold temporal power**. Christ Himself taught that the State or Caesar was to have dominion over temporal affairs.
- iii. Wycliffe held that Christ also encouraged His followers to live in poverty, without accumulating temporal wealth. When wealth was accumulated and misused as it had been in the monasteries, the State, under God, had the right to take the property and redistribute it.<sup>2</sup>
- iv. It is interesting to note that when reform did finally come in the English church, it began in a way similar to that outlined by Wycliffe—with the State disendowing the Church.
- v. Wycliffe also held that the **true Church is made up of those predestined by God. Many in the visible Church, including popes, might not even be part of the true Church**. Therefore, it was necessary for the government to properly assert its authority under God in areas where the visible Church erred.

#### v. The Bible is the “preeminent authority” for every Christian.

- i. Not the church and not tradition
- ii. Thus, **every Christian ought to have a Bible in his own language**.
- iii. The midlands English dialect of Oxford and London became standard English because of the writings of Chaucer and the translation of Wycliffe.

---

<sup>2</sup> Two centuries later, that is exactly what happened in England when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries and seized church property.

- vi. Wycliffe rejected **transubstantiation**.
  - i. Believed that **the bread and the wine remain unchanged**. Christ was present in the bread, but He was present with His power, not in His physical body.
  - ii. Also believed that faith was necessary to receive the sacrament.
- vii. **Preaching** is “the most precious activity of the church.”
 

“Preaching the Gospel exceeds prayer and administration of the sacraments to an infinite degree”—Wycliffe
- viii. Salvation is by **grace**
  - i. Wycliffe understood Augustine’s emphasis on grace.
  - ii. Wycliffe’s *Short Rule of Life*: “**At the end of the day**, think about how you have offended God...and think...how graciously God has saved you; not for your desert, but for his own mercy and goodness.”
  - iii. Wycliffe was influenced by **Thomas Bradwardine (c. 1290–1349)**
    - a. Influential English theologian; mentor figure in Wycliffe’s intellectual world
    - b. Wrote *On the Cause of God against the Pelagians* (defense of God’s sovereignty and grace)
    - c. Strongly opposed emerging semi-Pelagian tendencies in the medieval church
    - d. Called *Doctor Profundus* (“the Profound Doctor”) for his theological depth
    - e. Appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1349 but died of the Black Death about 40 days later
    - f. **Influence on Wycliffe:**
      - i. Recovered **Augustinian emphasis on grace**
      - ii. Challenged **human-centered theology**
      - iii. Elevated **God’s authority**, paving the way for Wycliffe’s emphasis on **Scripture over church tradition**
      - iv. **Bradwardine was a theological reset toward Augustine that helped make Wycliffe possible**

## ix. Indulgences

- i. The Church taught that there was a treasury of merit bought with the suffering and righteousness of Christ and the saints. The Pope, as the keeper of the keys of St. Peter, could unlock this treasury and bestow a remittance from punishment for sins, both in time and in purgatory.
  - ii. In Wycliffe's day and later, such indulgences could be **bought for a price**. It was possible to lessen one's time in purgatory—or a loved one's time in purgatory—by buying an indulgence. (Purgatory according to Catholic doctrine was an intermediate place where souls went after death for sins to be purged in preparation for Heaven.)
  - iii. Indulgences **could also be obtained by saying prayers or performing certain religious acts** (e.g. going on pilgrimages or visiting certain holy shrines). **The earliest record of an indulgence was in 1016 when the archbishop of Arles gave an indulgence of a year to those who helped erect a church building. Popes regularly granted indulgences to those who participated in the crusades.**
  - iv. Wycliffe opposed the entire concept of indulgences, especially the selling of them. He reasoned **sin cannot be pardoned for money, and righteousness cannot be bought and sold. If the pope had the power to unconditionally forgive sin, he should forgive the sins of everyone!**
  - v. Indulgences remain part of Roman Catholic doctrine today, but since the Reformation the buying and selling of indulgences has been strictly prohibited ([Reformation Overview](#)).
- b. **The Lollards** (followers of Wycliffe)
- i. The name 'Lollard' was probably a nickname given by enemies, meaning something like 'mumbler'—a dismissive way of talking about those who followed Wycliffe.
  - ii. According to one contemporary report, they were everywhere, "A man could scarcely meet two people on the road, but one of them was a disciple of Wycliffe."
  - iii. In his move to return to the strength of the primitive church, **Wycliffe did not set up a new order of monks** as previous medieval reformers had done. Rather, **he sought to strengthen the teachings and moral character of the parish priests**. Wycliffe's Christianity was more Scriptural than sacramental, and **he saw the role of the parish priest as primarily**

**teaching the Scriptures to his flock.** *The sermons of the friars consisted mostly of legends and tales of saints. Wycliffe showed his true opposition to the contemporary medieval tradition in his strong emphasis on Scriptural exegesis in his sermons.*

- iv. This of course led to the **translation of the Bible** into English for even the common people to read. Though Wycliffe did not translate the entire Bible himself, it is indisputable that he was the inspiration and guide behind the translation work.
- v. Wycliffe in his *On the Office of Pastor* outlined **three main duties for the pastor.**
  - i. First, **he must preach the gospel.** Declaring God's Word was the most worthy deed the priests could do. Standing contrary to the entire religious establishment of his day, Wycliffe taught that preaching was more important than administering the sacraments, since it was by preaching the Word of God that Christ's Body, the Church, was truly built up.
  - ii. The pastor also had the duty of **keeping his sheep from wolves**, whom Wycliffe primarily interpreted as the friars.
  - iii. Thirdly, the shepherd should "grease" or **anoint the "scabbed sheep,"** giving them the medicine of God's law whereby they can be made whole.
- vi. Wycliffe sent out his poor preachers into the countryside on the premise that **right thinking leads to right living. By teaching the truth to the people, their lives would naturally become more Christian.** Wycliffe's method of sending out preachers to teach the people God's law was in some ways similar to the program of John Wesley centuries later. **Both reformers recognized that only by the people of England receiving instruction in the truths of God could a true reformation take place resulting in a regeneration of English life in all areas.**
- c. Wycliffe left Oxford in 1381 to his home parish in Lutterworth.
- d. "*The Earthquake Council*" (1382) condemned the teachings of John Wycliffe.

An earthquake occurred during the council, which different groups interpreted differently:

- i. Some saw it as **God's judgment on Wycliffe's teachings**

ii. Others (including Wycliffe's supporters) saw it as **God's displeasure with the council**

- e. Wycliffe died in **1384** at his parish in Lutterworth.
- f. The Council of Constance (1415) formally condemned Wycliffe's teachings and ordered his writings destroyed.

The same council also condemned and executed Jan Hus by burning.

*(Wycliffe himself was already dead, so this is a posthumous condemnation.)*

- g. In **1428**, by order of the Council of Constance, Wycliffe's bones were exhumed, burned, and his ashes scattered in a nearby stream.

"They burned his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook...The Swift conveyed them into the Avon; the Avon into the Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and then into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed the world over." — Thomas Fuller

ii. John Hus of Bohemia (1372-1415) (12 years old when Wycliffe died)

- a. His name literally means "goose"—and though they burned the goose, God raised up the swan.
- b. Chronology of His Life



1372	Born in Husinec in South Bohemia—75 miles southwest of Prague	1410	Excommunicated and forbidden to preach
1390	Began studies at the University of Prague	1412	Interdict placed upon Prague. Hus withdrew from Prague, writing and preaching in the countryside
1400	Ordained a priest	1413	Wrote his major work, <i>De Ecclesia—The Church</i>
1401	Appointed Dean of Faculty at University at Prague	1414	Traveled to Constance and was arrested
1402	Rector and preacher at Chapel of Holy Innocents of Bethlehem	1415	July 6—Condemned and burned at the stake
1408	Deposed as synodal preacher		

- c. The National Hero
  - i. Bohemian (Czech) Reformer
  - ii. When the communists were in control of Czechoslovakia, they sponsored the restoration of Bethlehem chapel as a monument to the proto-socialism of the Hussites. When a revolt against communist rule occurred in Czechoslovakia in the 1960's, Hus' statue in the center of Prague was surrounded with flowers and people proclaiming the liberty of conscience for which Hus had died ([Reformation Overview](#)).
- d. Influenced by Wycliffe
  - i. **Anne of Bohemia** was married to King Richard II of England. Thus, there was a steady movement between England and Bohemia, particularly with students going from Prague to Oxford and then returning to Bohemia.
  - ii. Czech students returning from Oxford to Bohemia brought Wycliffe's ideas, doctrines, and books back. John Hus began to read those books, and he was greatly influenced.
- e. Eventually **became rector of the University of Prague**. Though from humble beginnings, his education was likely supported through patronage and church-related opportunities, reflecting recognition of his intellectual ability.
- f. Pastor of Bethlehem Chapel
  - i. Jan Hus became a highly popular preacher at Bethlehem Chapel.
  - ii. The chapel had been founded by two wealthy patrons who desired a place where the Word of God would be preached in the **language of the people**, rather than in Latin.
  - iii. Hus preached powerful sermons at Bethlehem Chapel in the Czech language (the Bohemian language), drawing large crowds—often estimated between **1,000 and 2,000 people**.
- g. Themes of his preaching
  - i. Christ the head of the church
    - i. Like Wycliffe before him, Hus believed that the true church was made up of those whom God had chosen.
    - ii. There might even be many in the official hierarchy of the visible church who were not part of the true church. **True Christianity was not to be found in monastic orders, indulgences, masses, or**

“**wishing to be pious by the piety of others.**” True Christians may be recognized by whether they seek the glory of God and the salvation of men.

- iii. It matters little to inquire whether one is sent by a pope or a bishop or whether he has certain papers or confirmations. Instead, we should recognize that he is sent of God when he diligently seeks the salvation of men and the praise of God ([Reformation Overview](#)).
  - iv. “There is no other such pontiff except the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, our pontiff. **Christ is the only head of the church, and Christ preserves His church during difficult and dangerous times so that, even now, while there are three so-called papal head, she remains the one spouse of the Lord.**”
  - v. **On the walls of Bethlehem Chapel Hus had painted various pictures and inscriptions** which contradicted the unscriptural teachings which he believed had developed in the Roman church. **One showed the pope in resplendent dress riding a large horse while Christ is shown in poverty carrying His cross. Note: This was for teaching purposes, not veneration.**
- ii. Bible alone and grace alone
    - i. A **hymn** the people at Bethlehem Chapel sang before Hus preached: “The Word of God which ne’er shall cease, proclaims free pardon, grace, and peace. Salvation shows in Christ alone, the perfect will of God makes known.”
    - ii. **Hus said a man can receive the pardon of his sins only through the power of God and by the merits of Christ.**
    - iii. While other churches were selling indulgences, Hus preached, “Let who will proclaim the contrary. Let the pope, or a bishop, or a priest say, ‘I forgive thy sins; I absolve thee from their penalty. I free thee from the pains of hell.’ It is all vain. It helps thee nothing. God alone, I repeat, God alone can forgive sins through Christ. He pardons those who truly repent.”
    - iv. Indulgences were not sold at Bethlehem Chapel
  - iii. Authority and doctrine
    - i. Hus argued against the ultimate authority of the pope and taught that Christ alone is the head of the Church, though he did not reject all church structure

- ii. He argued against veneration of the pope, yet accepted purgatory, showing his reform was not yet complete
  - iv. The Lord's Supper - Hus held a view of the Lord's Supper that was similar to what would later be called consubstantiation.
- h. Hus promoted and used vernacular Scripture (Czech language).
- i. Hus was excommunicated by Pope Alexander V in 1410.
  - i. Prague was placed under **interdict**.
  - ii. In response Hus left the city and continued to preach in rural areas.
- j. Council of Constance 1415
  - i. More than 50,000 people came to the Swiss town of Constance for the Council, which met from 1414 to 1417. Delegates from all Europe included 33 cardinals, 238 bishops, a thousand university scholars, representatives of 83 kings, and 2000 musicians. There were also over 700 prostitutes.
  - ii. The atmosphere was more like a fair with tournaments, dances, acrobatic shows, and music. It was not the scene of sober piety one would expect at a church gathering.
  - iii. **The Council met to resolve the Great Schism between Gregory, Benedict, and John XXIII who each claimed to be pope.** Ridding the church of all three, the Council persuaded Gregory XII and Benedict XIII to resign, and deposed John by convicting him on charges of simony, sodomy, lying,<sup>3</sup> and unchastity.<sup>3</sup>
  - iv. The council elected Martin V the new pope.
  - v. Though John XXIII was convicted of grievous sins and immorality, the Council simply deposed him and allowed him to leave the city.
  - vi. John Hus, however, was burned at the stake for his beliefs. The Council formulated 42 articles against John Hus' teachings. Thirty-six of these were taken from his work *The Church*, which in turn was almost a direct translation of a work by Wycliffe. Some of Hus' teachings to which objections were made were the following:
    - i. The true Church is made up of those chosen or predestined by God.
    - ii. Christ, not Peter, is the Rock on which the Church is built.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory XII resigned voluntarily. Benedict XIII resisted longer.

- iii. There should be no secular punishment for heresy.
- iv. A preacher should continue preaching if he has been *unjustly* excommunicated.
- v. If a pope, bishop or prelate is in mortal sin he is not a true minister.
- vi. Most aspects of the interdict of Prague were unscriptural.
- vii. Wycliffe should not be condemned completely without proper Scriptural refutation.
- vii. Hus was also accused of articles which he did not believe. For example, Wycliffe had denied the doctrine of transubstantiation, and Hus was accused of doing the same, though he had never done so. He was also charged of claiming to be the **fourth person of the Trinity**.
- viii. **Sigismund**, the Holy Roman Emperor, had granted Hus safe conduct. However, under pressure from the Catholic Church, Sigismund revoked his promise of safe conduct being told he didn't have to keep a promise to a heretic.
- ix. Hus was burned at the stake July 6, 1415. He died singing.
- x. A prayer John Hus wrote a few days before his death in 1415: "Grant me a ready spirit, a fearless heart, a right faith, a firm hope, and a perfect love, that for thy sake I may lay down my life with patience and joy."

k. Luther on Hus

"Observe how firmly Hus clung in his writings and words to the doctrines of Christ. With what courage he struggled against the agonies of death. With what patience and humility he suffered every indignity. And with what greatness of soul he at last confronted a cruel death in defense of the truth, doing all these things alone before an imposing assembly of the great ones of the earth like a lamb in the midst of lions and wolves. If such a man is to be regarded as a heretic, no person under the sun can be looked on as a true Christian."

"I have hitherto taught and held all the opinions of Hus without knowing it. We are, all of us, Hussites without knowing it."

1. The Legacy of Jan Hus
  - i. Jan Hus was executed, but his influence endured
    - i. the Hussite movement continued after his death
    - ii. it later developed into the Moravian Church (still existing today)
    - iii. Moravians became zealous missionaries (e.g., Jamaica)
    - iv. annual July 6 service: "In Memory of Martyrs," honoring Hus and all martyrs
  - ii. Hus and the Bohemian people
    - i. deeply connected to the Czech people; remembered as a national hero in Prague
    - ii. preached in the language of the people, not Latin
    - iii. sought to encourage and elevate locals amid foreign (German) dominance
  - iii. Hus stands as
    - i. a faithful preacher of the Word
    - ii. a courageous martyr
    - iii. a forerunner of the Reformation
  - iv. His life reminds us
    - i. God uses suffering servants to prepare the way for greater works
  - v. Hus monument in Prague
    - i. "Live for truth, fight for truth, die for truth."
  - vi. There's a famous statement attributed to Hus before his execution: "You may cook this goose, but in a hundred years a swan will arise..."
    - i. Many later connected this to Martin Luther
    - ii. Luther himself embraced the imagery—the "swan" following the "goose"

**Homework: "Martin Luther and Protestantism" (Shelley, chapter 24)**