

What you need to know about John Wycliffe:

- Early life and career
- Wycliffe's attack on the Church
- Translation of the Bible
- Death



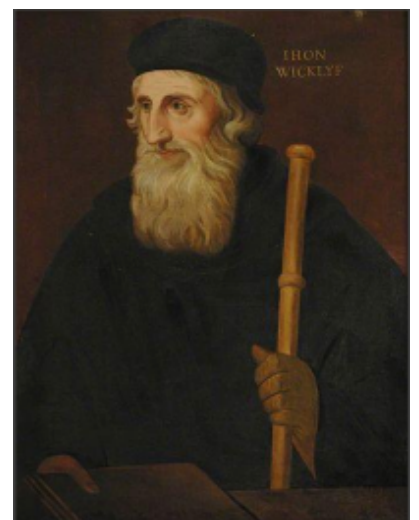
**FACT FILE**

**Let's find out more about  
John Wycliffe!**



John Wycliffe was an English theologian, priest, and scholar who is regarded as a predecessor of the European Protestant Reformation. Wycliffe criticised medieval Church procedures, highlighting many of the same injustices that would subsequently be addressed by other reformers. Wycliffe questioned the clergy's privileged position, which had reinforced their prominent role in England, as well as the wealth and grandeur of local churches and their festivities. His most famous work is the translation of the Bible into English.

Wycliffe was born around 1330 in the North Riding of Yorkshire to a family of lesser nobility. He attended the prestigious Oxford University, where he fulfilled his doctoral requirement by giving a series of lectures on the whole Bible. As a teacher, he soon became Oxford's leading philosopher and theologian.



JOHN WYCLIFFE

## THE REFORMATION



JOHN WYCLIFFE

The Protestant Reformation (1517-1648) was a major theological, cultural, and social revolution in 16th-century Europe that shattered the medieval Church's control, allowing for the development of new interpretations of the Christian message and contributing to the foundation of modern nation-states. It is widely regarded as one of the most significant events in Western history.

As a young man, Wycliffe survived the Black Death Epidemic of 1347-52. The plague's misery and the Church's incapacity to address it significantly inspired the young theologian, who formed a dark perspective of the human condition. Over time, he grew increasingly frustrated that the Church was doing nothing to improve people's lives.

Wycliffe was a religious reformer and he saw serious failings in the Church. He was concerned about what he saw as corruption in the Church hierarchy and the difficulty that ordinary people had in reading the Scriptures. In Wycliffe's day, the Bible was in Latin and therefore it was impossible for people who weren't educated to understand it.

Wycliffe also had some radical ideas about the Eucharist – the wine and bread that is consumed in Christian church services. He argued that this bread and wine did not actually turn into the body and blood of Christ in the ceremony – a view that put him at odds with the conventional teaching of the Church at the time.

## POWERFUL FRIENDS, POWERFUL ENEMIES

Wycliffe was lucky not to have been burned as a heretic in his lifetime. Throughout his life he was protected by powerful friends. He was repeatedly summoned to appear before royal and Church officials, but one way or another, he always avoided the death sentence.

Despite this royal protection, in May 1382 Wycliffe was condemned at the Blackfriars Council. In June of the previous year there had been a rebellion in England, known as the Peasants' Revolt: a group of rebels had marched on London, where they burnt buildings and murdered anyone they encountered who was thought to be associated with the government. It's unclear what influence Wycliffe's works had on the rebels, but his ideas became associated with them and the powers to be used this to plot against him.

## HIS DEATH AND LEGACY

In later years, Wycliffe led a quiet life in Lutterworth. He died peacefully in 1384 but his ideas lived on for much longer. He declared Scripture to be divinely inspired in every part and that it was the only standard of life for all people, from peasants to kings and popes.

By the fourteenth century, a few portions of the Bible had been translated into Old English, but there was no version in the everyday language of most of the English people. John Wycliffe was inspired to do something about this and began the work of translating such a Bible. After his death, his students continued this translation work to complete the first full English translation of the Bible.

