

4 A Century of Turmoil

TERMS & NAMES

- Avignon
- Great Schism
- John Wycliffe
- Jan Hus
- bubonic plague
- Hundred Years' War
- Joan of Arc

MAIN IDEA

During the 1300s, Europe was torn apart by religious strife, the bubonic plague, and the Hundred Years' War.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Events of the 1300s led to a change in attitudes toward religion and the state, a change reflected in modern attitudes.

SETTING THE STAGE At the turn of the century between the 1200s and 1300s, church and state seemed in good shape, but trouble was brewing. The Church seemed to be thriving. Ideals of fuller political representation seemed to be developing in France and England. However, the 1300s were filled with disasters, both natural and manmade. By the end of the century, the medieval way of life was beginning to disappear.

A Church Divided

At the beginning of the 1300s, the papacy seemed in some ways still strong. Soon, however, both pope and Church were in desperate trouble.

Pope and King Collide The pope in 1300 was an able but stubborn Italian. Pope Boniface VIII attempted to enforce papal authority on kings as previous popes had. When King Philip IV of France asserted his authority over French bishops, Boniface responded with a papal bull (an official document issued by the pope). It stated, "We declare, state, and define that subjection to the Roman Pontiff is absolutely necessary for the salvation of every human creature." In short, kings must always obey popes. Philip merely sneered at this bull. In fact one of Philip's ministers is said to have remarked that "my master's sword is made of steel, the pope's is made of [words]." Instead of obeying the pope, in September 1303 Philip had him held prisoner. The king planned to bring him to France for trial. The pope was rescued, but the elderly Boniface died a month later. Never again would a pope be able to force monarchs to obey him.

Avignon and the Great Schism While Philip IV failed to keep Pope Boniface captive, in 1305 he persuaded the College of Cardinals to choose a French archbishop as the new pope. Clement V, the selected pope, shortly moved from Rome to the city of **Avignon** (av-vee-NYAWN) in France. Popes would live there for the next 67 years.

The move to Avignon badly weakened the Church. When reformers finally tried to move the papacy back to Rome, however, the result was even worse. In 1378, Pope Gregory XI died while visiting Rome. The College of Cardinals then met in Rome to choose a successor. As they deliberated, they could hear a mob outside screaming, "A Roman, a Roman, we want a Roman for pope, or at least an Italian!" Finally, the cardinals announced to the crowd that an Italian had been chosen: Pope Urban VI. Many cardinals regretted their choice almost immediately. Urban VI's passion for reform and his arrogant personality caused French cardinals to elect another pope a few months later. They chose Robert of Geneva, who spoke French. He took the name Clement VII.



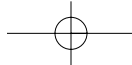
Boniface VIII served as pope from 1294 to 1303. This woodcut of Boniface was done in Venice in 1592.

Vocabulary

Pontiff: the pope.

Background

People outside France concluded that the Avignon popes were pawns of the French kings. They believed that the Church was held captive in Avignon just as, centuries before, the Jews had been held captive in Babylon. This period in Church history came to be called the Babylonian Captivity.



Now there were two popes. Each declared the other to be a false pope, excommunicating his rival. The French pope lived in Avignon, while the Italian pope lived in Rome. This began the split in the Church known as the **Great Schism** (SIHZ-uhm), or division.

The Council of Constance had as its major task to end the Great Schism by choosing a new pope. In 1414, when the Council of Constance began its meetings, there were a total of three popes: the Avignon pope, the Roman pope, and a third pope elected by an earlier council at Pisa. With the help of the Holy Roman Emperor, the council forced all three popes to resign. In 1417, the council chose a new pope, Martin V, ending the Great Schism.

A Scholarly Challenge to Church Authority The papacy was further challenged in the late 1300s and early 1400s by two professors. One was an Englishman named **John Wycliffe** (WIHK-lihf). He preached that Jesus Christ, not the pope, was the true head of the Church. He was much offended by the worldliness and wealth many clergy displayed. The pope himself, as Wycliffe noted, lived in shameful luxury, serving dinner on gold and silver plates to guests dressed in costly furs. Wycliffe believed that the clergy should own no land or wealth.

Wycliffe also taught that the Bible alone—not the pope—was the final authority for Christian life. He helped spread this idea by inspiring an English translation of the New Testament of the Bible, which at the time was available only in French or Latin. Wycliffe's radical ideas were discussed widely throughout England. Influenced by Wycliffe's writings, **Jan Hus**, a professor in Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), taught that the authority of the Bible was higher than that of the pope. Hus was excommunicated in 1412. In 1414, the German emperor Sigismund arranged the Council of Constance. He urged Hus to attend and even gave him safe conduct. When Hus arrived at the meeting, however, he was seized and tried as a heretic, then burned at the stake in 1415.



This scene from a 15th-century book shows Jan Hus being burned at the stake in 1415.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

A. Contrasting

What was the true source of religious authority, according to the different beliefs of the time?

The Bubonic Plague Strikes

Artists of the 1300s depicted death as the Grim Reaper, a skeleton on horseback whose scythe cut people down. The image is appropriate—approximately one-third of the population of Europe died of the deadly disease known as the **bubonic plague**.

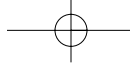
Origins and Symptoms of the Plague The plague began in Asia. Traveling the trade lanes, it infected most of Asia and the Muslim world. Inevitably it reached Europe. In 1347, a fleet of Genoese merchant ships arrived in Sicily carrying a dread cargo. This was the disease that became known as the Black Death. It got the name because of the purplish or blackish spots it produced on the skin. The disease swept through Italy. From there it followed trade routes to France, Germany, England, and other parts of Europe.

Unlike catastrophes that pull communities together, this epidemic was so terrifying that it ripped apart the very fabric of society. Giovanni Boccaccio, an Italian writer of the time, described its effect:

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

This scourge had implanted so great a terror in the hearts of men and women that brothers abandoned brothers, uncles their nephews, sisters their brothers, and in many cases wives deserted their husbands. But even worse, . . . fathers and mothers refused to nurse and assist their own children.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO, *The Decameron*



Vocabulary

scapegoat: one that is made to bear the blame of others.

Frightened people looked around for a scapegoat. They found one in the Jews, who were blamed for bringing on the plague by poisoning the wells. All over Europe, Jews were driven from their homes or, worse, massacred.

The bubonic plague took about four years to reach almost every corner of Europe. In any given community, approximately three-quarters of those who caught the disease died. Before the bubonic plague ran its course, it killed almost 25 million Europeans and many more millions in Asia and North Africa.

Effects of the Plague The plague returned every few years, though it never struck as severely as in the first outbreak. However, the periodic attacks further reduced the population.

The economic effects of the plague were enormous. Town populations fell. Trade declined. Prices rose. Fewer people meant that workers were scarce everywhere. Farmland was abandoned or used to pasture sheep, which required less labor. Serfs had often been unpaid or poorly paid for their labor. They left the manor in search of better wages. The old manorial system began to crumble. Nobles fiercely resisted peasant demands for higher wages, causing peasant revolts in England, France, Italy, and Belgium.

The Church suffered a loss of prestige when its prayers and penances failed to stop the onslaught of the bubonic plague. In addition, many clergy deserted their flocks or charged high fees to perform services for the dying.

Many people who saw how abruptly life could end became pessimistic about life itself, fearing the future. As one poet of the time wrote, “Happy is he who has no children.” Art and literature of the time reflect an unusual awareness of death. On the other hand, many people became occupied with pleasure and self-indulgence. They displayed the attitude of “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may die.”


The bubonic plague and its aftermath disrupted medieval society, hastening changes that were already in the making. The society of the Middle Ages was collapsing. The century of war between England and France was that society’s final death struggle.

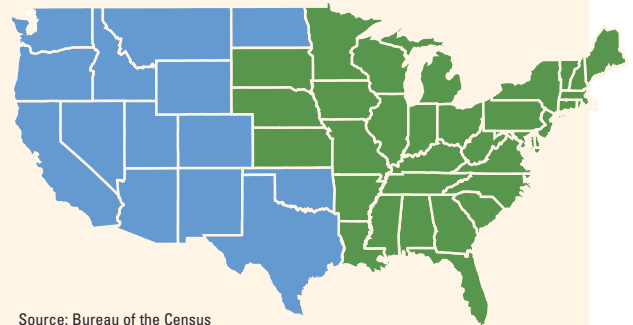
The Hundred Years’ War

When the last Capetian king died without a successor, England’s Edward III claimed the right to the French throne as grandson of Philip IV. The war that Edward III launched for that throne continued on and off from 1337 to 1453. It became known as the **Hundred Years’ War** and added to the century’s miseries. The war was a seesaw affair, fought on French soil. Victory passed back and forth between the two countries. Finally, between 1421 and 1453, the French rallied and drove the English out of France entirely, except for the port city of Calais.

The Battle of Crécy While the French eventually won the war, the English won three important battles in France. The first and most spectacular was the Battle of Crécy (KREHS-ee). Some of the combatants were still operating under medieval ideals of chivalry. They were anxious to perform noble deeds in war. They looked with contempt on the common foot soldiers and archers who fought alongside them. However, in the Battle of Crécy, it was the English archers who won the day.

If the Plague Struck America Today

The bubonic plague reportedly wiped out about one-third of Europe’s population in the 1300s. In the United States today, a one-third death toll would equal nearly 79 million people, or the number living in the states represented by the color .



Source: Bureau of the Census

SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Charts

1. How many states on the chart would have lost their entire population to the plague?
2. How might the chart help explain why many Europeans thought the world was ending?

Vocabulary

penance: an act performed to show sorrow for a sin or wrongdoing.

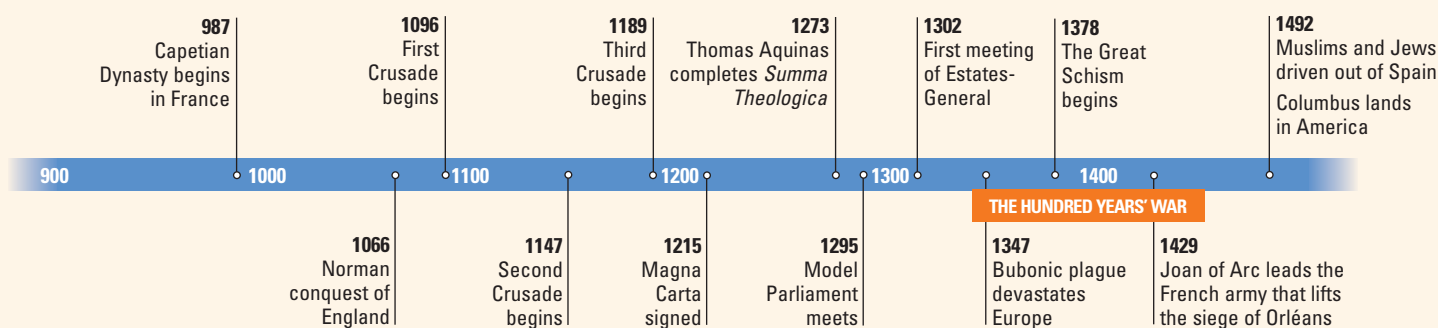
THINK THROUGH HISTORY

B. Recognizing

Effects What were some of the effects of the plague?



Important Events in the Middle Ages



English and French forces met near the town of Crécy on August 26, 1346. English men-at-arms and their longbowmen were outnumbered by a French army three times its size, including armored knights and a force of archers with crossbows. Mounted on warhorses and protected by heavy armor, French knights believed themselves invincible and attacked.

Meanwhile, English longbowmen let fly thousands of arrows at the oncoming French. The crossbowmen, out of range and peppered with English arrows, retreated in panic. A French noble, seeing the crossbowmen fleeing, shouted, "Slay these rascals who get in our way!" The knights trampled their own archers in an effort to cut a path through them. English longbowmen sent volley after volley of deadly arrows. They unhorsed knights who then lay helplessly on the ground in their heavy armor. Then, using long knives, the English foot soldiers attacked, slaughtering the French. At the end of the day, more than a third of the French force lay dead. Among them were some of the most honored in chivalry. The longbow, not chivalry, had won the day.

Background

The English archers aimed for the horses' unprotected rumps. Wounded horses fell, causing chaos.



SPOTLIGHT ON

The Longbow

The bow and arrow reached one of its peaks from the 1200s through the early 1400s with the longbow. The string of the "short bow" was drawn back to the chest. The longbow was as tall as a man, or taller, and the string was pulled back to the archer's ear. A six-foot-tall man might have a bow seven feet tall.

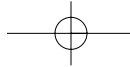
English archers usually carried a case with extra bowstrings and a sheaf of 24 arrows with them into battle. The arrows were balanced in flight by feathers. The arrows were dangerous at a range of 300 yards. They were absolutely fatal within 100 yards. Writers of the time say that the sound of several thousand arrows whistling through the air was terrifying.

Poitiers and Agincourt The English repeated their victory ten years later at the Battle of Poitiers (pwah-TYAY). Near the town of Poitiers, France, the French believed they had caught the English at a disadvantage. When the overconfident knights charged on foot, English longbowmen greeted them with volleys of arrows so thick that the air grew dark. French knights were helpless. The French king John and his son Philip were captured and held for ransom.

The third English victory, the Battle of Agincourt (AJ-ihn-KAWRT), took place in 1415. Again the English army was outnumbered, with their 6,000 troops against a French force of 20,000 to 30,000. Led by King Henry V, English archers again won a victory over the heavily armored French knights. The success of the longbow in these battles spelled doom for chivalric warfare. The mounted, heavily armored medieval knight was soon to become extinct.

Joan of Arc Five years after Agincourt, the French and English signed a treaty stating that Henry V would inherit the French crown at the death of the French king Charles VI. The French had lost hope. Then, in 1429, a teenage French peasant girl named **Joan of Arc** felt moved by God to rescue France from its English conquerors. She believed that heavenly voices spoke to her. They told her to drive the English out of France and give the French crown to France's true king, Charles VI's son.

Joan convinced Charles that she was sincere. On May 7, 1429, Joan led the French army into battle against an English fort that blocked the roads to Orléans. The English had been besieging the city for over six months. Without help, the city's



defenders could not hold out much longer. The English forts had to be taken in order to lift the siege. It was a hard-fought battle for both sides, and the French finally retreated in despair. But suddenly, Joan and a few soldiers charged back toward the fort. The entire French army stormed after her. The siege of Orléans was broken. Joan of Arc guided the French onto the path of victory.

After that victory, Joan persuaded Charles to go with her to Reims. There he was crowned king on July 17, 1429. Joan helped turn the tide for France. In 1430, she was captured in battle by the Burgundians, England's allies. They turned her over to the English. The English, in turn, handed her over to Church authorities to stand trial. Although the French king Charles VII owed his crown to Joan, he did nothing to rescue her. Condemned as a witch and a heretic because of her claim to hear voices, Joan was tied to a stake and burned to death on May 30, 1431.

The Impact of the Hundred Years' War The long, exhausting war finally ended in 1453, with the English left with only the French port of Calais. For France, the war—despite its terrible costs in lives, property, and money—ultimately raised the power and prestige of the French monarch. Nonetheless, it took a long time for some regions in France to recover.

The war gave birth in both countries to a feeling of nationalism. No longer did people think of the king as simply a feudal lord, but as a national leader fighting for the glory of the country.

Following the Hundred Years' War, the English suffered a period of internal turmoil known as the War of the Roses, in which two noble houses fought for the throne. Nevertheless, this war was responsible for strengthening the English Parliament. Edward III's constant need for money to finance the war led him to call Parliament as many as 27 times, asking for new taxes. Gradually, Parliament's "power of the purse" became firmly established, sowing another seed of democracy.

The end of the Hundred Years' War in 1453 is considered by some historians as the end of the Middle Ages. The twin pillars of the medieval world—intense religious devotion and the code of chivalry—both crumbled. The Age of Faith died a slow death. This death was caused by the Great Schism, the scandalous display of wealth by the Church, and the discrediting of the Church during the bubonic plague. The Age of Chivalry died on the battlefields of Crécy, Poitiers, and Agincourt.

HISTORY MAKERS



JOAN OF ARC
1412?–1431

When Joan was just 13 she began to have visions and hear what she believed were voices of the saints urging her to help Charles VII drive the English from France. When helping to lift the English siege of Orléans, she said:

You, men of England, who have no right in the kingdom of France, the King of Heaven sends the order through me, Joan the Maid, to return to your own country.

In 1430, she was turned over to a Church court for trial. Because of her claim to hear voices, Joan was tried for witchcraft and heresy. In truth, her trial was more political than religious. The English were embarrassed that a teenage girl had defeated them.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY

C. Recognizing

Effects What were some of the consequences of the Hundred Years' War?

Section 4 Assessment

1. TERMS & NAMES

Identify

- Avignon
- Great Schism
- John Wycliffe
- Jan Hus
- bubonic plague
- Hundred Years' War
- Joan of Arc

2. TAKING NOTES

Using a chart like the one below, identify the main cause and the long-term effect of the three events.

	Main Cause	Long-Term Effect
Split in Church		
Bubonic plague		
Hundred Years' War		

Which event had some positive economic effects? Explain.

3. IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS

What problems did survivors face after the bubonic plague swept through their town?

THINK ABOUT

- the number of dead
- the social, political, and economic chaos

4. ANALYZING THEMES

Religious and Ethical Systems

Do you think John Wycliffe and Jan Hus posed a real threat to the Church? Why or why not?

THINK ABOUT

- the two men's ideas
- the condition of the Church at the time