

Jones, Timothy Paul

Christian History Made Easy Participant Guide

13. Session 7 — Everything Falls Apart (AD 1300–1500)

This session covers two centuries of crisis for the medieval church. War, plague, and papal chaos shook people's trust in God and in church leaders. In the same period, God raised up reformers, translators, and new learning that planted the seeds of the coming Reformation.

Key takeaways

- The 'Babylonian Captivity of the Church' (1305–1377): popes lived in Avignon, France, not Rome, for 72 years, until Catherine of Siena persuaded Gregory XI to return.
- The Great Papal Schism: rival popes were elected in Rome and Avignon (1378), and the Council of Pisa (1409) made a third — three popes at once. This wrecked lay confidence in the church.
- The Bubonic Plague (Black Death) killed roughly a third of Europe in the mid-1300s, spreading fear of death, hell, and judgment — and doubt about whether the church told the truth about God.

- Reformers turned people back to Scripture: John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English (1382); Jan Hus in Bohemia denied that the pope was head of the church.
- The Council of Constance (1414–1418) ended the schism with one pope, but burned Hus at the stake and condemned the dead Wycliffe.
- A revival of learning followed: the fall of Constantinople (1453) sent classical texts west, Renaissance humanism grew, and Gutenberg's printing press (1440) let ordinary people read the Bible for themselves — less dependent on the church.

Passages worth keeping

“Only Christ is the head of the church, his predestined ones are the body, and each one of them is a member of that body.”

Jan Hus's claim that Christ, not the pope, rules the church — the conviction he died for and that later inspired Luther.

“Englishmen learn Christ's law best in English.”

Wycliffe's case for putting Scripture in the people's own language.

How it connects

The thread through the darkness is God's Word. When corrupt leadership and disaster hid the gospel, God used translators like Wycliffe, martyrs like Hus, and the printing press to put Scripture back into people's hands — setting up the Reformation.

Scripture referenced

- **Ezekiel 37** -- Dry bones brought to life — picture of a spiritually dry age revived by God's Word.
- **Judges 17:6; 21:25** -- 'No king in Israel' — parallel to failing to recognize Christ as the church's true King.
- **Ephesians 5:23** -- Christ is the head of the church, against papal claims to supremacy.
- **Ephesians 4:7-16; Acts 2:40-47** -- The New Testament's picture of the church, weighed against Boniface VIII's 'two swords' claim.
- **Psalms 119:105** -- God's Word as lamp and light in a dark age.
- **2 Corinthians 4:7-11** -- Treasure in jars of clay — God preserving his people through affliction.