

The factors that led to the decline of the middle ages

[History](#), [Middle Ages](#)



The late middle ages were years filled with turmoil. Famine, plague, turmoil in religion, and a war lasting over one hundred years all happened within the same two centuries. Many feared that these ages were the apocalypse, as these signs were those of the four horsemen predicted in religious scripture. Several people ran from urban surroundings in order to escape the chaos and disease spreading in the cities. The late middle ages were the ending of something old and the beginning of something that most hoped was better.

The decline of the middle ages was the result of famine and plague, decline of the papacy, and the hundred year's war. The middle ages declined in part because of famine and plague. The famine started in the early 14th century when the climate in Europe changed to a colder and moister climate. These cooler temperatures and wetter seasons resulted in a failure of crops in large parts of Europe, causing the prices to skyrocket. Prices of grain rose from a shilling to twenty shillings in 1315. Those who could not afford the high prices of grain were doomed to starve.

Those who starved not only lacked food but had a weakened immune system because of a lack of nutrients. Almost three decades later while people were still starving, a disease washed up on the shores of Messina known as the bubonic plague. The symptoms of this sickness were described by Georges Chastellain as, " The pulse trembles and he pants. The bones are disjointed on all sides; there is not a tendon which does not stretch as to burst. " Giovanni Boccaccio describes in the Decameron that bodies were piled outside houses and taken to large trenches, to where they were buried by the hundreds.

This plague spread throughout Europe and only rural unvisited communities were able to stay away from the plague. None could clearly identify the cause of this plague and as a result they turned to their own individual explanations. Many thought that the plague was sent from God as a form of punishment for sins that the people had committed. Some of these people went from town to town whipping themselves hoping that God would forgive them and the people around them. Others turned to a more worldly answer and punished the Jews for causing the plague.

Many Jews were tortured to confess that they had poisoned the water supply, and they were killed because of their supposed crime. Through the combination of the plague and famine medieval society started to collapse and the deterioration of the Middle Ages. During the middle ages the church was the center of the average person's life. However in the 14th century the papacy started to decline and individuals lost respect for the church because of the conciliar movement, and attacks from intellectuals.

Intellectuals felt that the Pope was too worldly and did not care about Christianity as much as he cared about having the finest things. Ramón de Cornet criticized the pope in Avignon saying, " I see the pope his sacred trust betray, for while the rich his grace can gain always... He strives to gather wealth as best he may, forcing Christ's people blindly to obey," John Wycliffe proposed several ideas about how to make the church less worldly. Two of these were about keeping the sacred practices of the church in the church instead of letting them be abused outside of the church.

All those who promoted these ideas were both condemned and executed for heresy or they were smart enough to stay away from the church officials. This caused a split in the church as some agreed with the intellectuals and others did not, causing a weak and divided Roman Catholic Church. Finally the conciliar movement is the last reason that caused the decline of the papacy. The conciliar movement was an attempt to answer the question of if there should be a council that shares the authority of the pope or if there should be a singular pope that exercises power.

In *Defensor Pacis* Marsilius of Padua states that, “ We now wish . . . to adduce the truths of the holy Scripture . . . which explicitly command or counsel that neither the Roman bishop called pope, nor any other bishop or priest, or deacon, has or ought to have any rulership or coercive judgment or jurisdiction over any priest or non-priest, ruler, community, group, or individual of whatever condition” This division caused many people to lose faith in the pope. The Conciliar movement, along with the attacks from intellectuals caused the decline of the church and the papacy.

The final event that contributed to the downfall of medieval society was the Hundred Years War. Starting in the mid-14th century, the Hundred Years War was fought between Britain and France and ended in the mid-15th century. The war started when the king of France died with no heirs. When selecting a king, some French nobles wanted an English king that did not want to centralize the government, while other French nobles wanted a French king to maintain national pride.

This sparked conflict over English controlled lands in France. The war lasted for many years and was mostly fought on French lands. Jean Froissart's account of a sacking during the war stated, " for upwards of three thousand men, women and children were put to death that day. God have mercy on their souls! for they were veritable martyrs," The English seemed to be winning in the war until Joan of Arc led the French army. The French started winning, and eventually led to the removal from the English in the French territory.

This led to a growth of nationalism in both countries as well as it started to cause the peasants to revolt. As Jean Froissart stated about the English Peasant Revolt, " they were too severely oppressed; that at the beginning of the world there were no slaves, and that no one ought to be treated as such, unless he had committed treason against his lord, as Lucifer had done against God: but they had done no such thing, for they were neither angels nor spirits, but men formed after the same likeness with their lords, who treated them as beasts.

This they would not longer bear, but had determined to be free, and if they laboured or did any other works for their lords, they would be paid for it. " These revolts caused feudal society to collapse slowly, adding to the decline of the medieval society caused by the Hundred Year's War. Overall the Hundred Year's War, the decline of the papacy, and famine and plague, mainly contributed to the wane of medieval society.

Famine and plague was caused by cool and wet climate changes as well as the spread disease throughout Europe. The decline of the papacy was the result

of the attacks from intellectuals and the conciliar movement. And finally the Hundred Year's War was the result of the selection of the French king and the argument over English lands in French territory. Medieval society declined for a number of reasons, but it never stopped suddenly. It was a gradual decline into another era filled with many facets and features.