

Homeschool Lesson:

John Wycliffe and the English Bible

Subject Areas:

History / Church History / English Language History

Grade Level:

Grades 7–10 (adaptable)

Estimated Time:

2–3 hours total (can be split over multiple days)

Lesson Overview

This lesson introduces students to **John Wycliffe**, a 14th-century scholar who helped make the Bible available in English. Students will learn about medieval church authority, why Bible translation mattered, and how Wycliffe influenced later reformers and the English language itself.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. Explain who John Wycliffe was and why he is important
 2. Describe why the Bible was not available in English during the Middle Ages
 3. Understand the risks of translating the Bible in the 1300s
 4. Identify the role of the Lollards
 5. Explain Wycliffe's long-term historical impact
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Materials Needed

- The reading: *"John Wycliffe and the English Bible"* (the story provided earlier)
- Notebook or paper
- Pen or pencil

- Optional: map of medieval England
 - Optional Bible (any English translation)
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Day 1: Background & Reading

Warm-Up Discussion (10–15 minutes)

Ask orally or have the student write short answers:

- How do most people today access the Bible?
- What would it be like if only religious leaders could read Scripture?
- Why might powerful institutions want to control information?

Explain briefly that during the Middle Ages, **Latin** was the language of the Church, and most people could not read it.

Reading Assignment (20–30 minutes)

Have the student read:

“John Wycliffe and the English Bible” (entire story or split into two parts)

Encourage:

- Underlining unfamiliar words
 - Writing questions in the margin
 - Pausing after sections to summarize aloud
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Vocabulary Study

Have the student define these words (dictionary or context clues):

- Vulgate
- Clergy
- Heresy
- Reform

- Manuscript
- Authority
- Translation

Optional extension: Ask the student to use each word in a sentence.

Day 2: Comprehension & Discussion

Comprehension Questions

Have the student answer in complete sentences:

1. Why was the Bible written in Latin during Wycliffe's time?
 2. What problems did Wycliffe see in the medieval Church?
 3. Why did Wycliffe believe the Bible should be translated into English?
 4. Who were the Lollards, and what did they do?
 5. Why did the Church oppose Wycliffe's teachings?
 6. What happened to Wycliffe after his death?
 7. Why is Wycliffe called the "Morning Star of the Reformation"?
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Discussion (Or Written Reflection)

Choose 1–2:

- Why do you think access to Scripture was so powerful?
 - Do you think translation can change how people understand ideas? Why?
 - Why might leaders fear people reading religious texts on their own?
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Day 3: Activities & Assessment

Activity Option 1: Timeline (Recommended)

Have the student create a timeline including:

- c. 1330 – Birth of John Wycliffe

- Oxford teaching years
 - English Bible translation
 - Rise of the Lollards
 - 1384 – Death of Wycliffe
 - 1415 – Condemnation after death
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Activity Option 2: Compare & Reflect

Have the student compare:

Bible access in Wycliffe's time vs. today

They can write:

- A paragraph
 - A chart
 - A short essay (1–2 pages)
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Activity Option 3: Writing Assignment

Choose one:

- Write a letter *as if you were a Lollard* explaining why English Scripture matters
 - Write a short essay: *Why John Wycliffe Changed History*
 - Write a paragraph explaining how Wycliffe influenced later reformers
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Assessment Options

Choose what fits your homeschool style:

- Written answers to comprehension questions
- Short essay (1–2 pages)
- Oral narration or presentation
- Timeline project

Optional Extensions

- Read a short passage from a modern Bible and discuss how language affects understanding
- Compare Wycliffe to William Tyndale or Martin Luther
- Study how the printing press later changed Bible access
- Add a geography component (map of England & Oxford)

Teacher Notes (Parent Guide)

- This lesson emphasizes **historical understanding**, not denominational theology
- Suitable for both religious and secular homeschool programs
- Encourages critical thinking about authority, language, and access to information

Teacher Answer Key

John Wycliffe and the English Bible

Part 1: Vocabulary

- 1. Vulgate**
The Latin translation of the Bible used by the medieval Church.
 - 2. Clergy**
Church leaders such as priests, bishops, and other religious officials.
 - 3. Heresy**
Beliefs or teachings that go against official Church doctrine.
 - 4. Reform**
Efforts to change or improve something, especially religious practices.
 - 5. Manuscript**
A document written by hand, often before the printing press.
 - 6. Authority**
The power or right to make decisions, give orders, or control beliefs.
 - 7. Translation**
Changing a text from one language into another.
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Part 2: Reading Comprehension

- 1. Who was John Wycliffe, and where did he teach?**
John Wycliffe was a theologian and scholar who taught at Oxford University in England.
- 2. Why could most people not read the Bible in the 1300s?**
Most people could not read Latin, and many were not literate at all.
- 3. What language was the Bible written in during Wycliffe's time, and why was this a problem?**
The Bible was written in Latin, which ordinary people could not understand.

4. **Why did Wycliffe believe the Bible should be translated into English?**

He believed all Christians should be able to read and understand Scripture for themselves.

5. **Who were the Lollards, and what role did they play?**

The Lollards were followers of Wycliffe who preached in English and spread the English Bible.

6. **How did the Church respond to Wycliffe's teachings?**

The Church condemned his teachings, removed him from Oxford, and later declared him a heretic.

7. **What happened to Wycliffe after his death?**

He was declared a heretic years later, and his bones were exhumed, burned, and scattered.

Part 3: Timeline Activity

Correct order:

1. **Wycliffe is born**
2. **John Wycliffe teaches at Oxford**
3. **The Bible is translated into English**
4. **The Lollards spread English Scripture**
5. **Wycliffe dies**
6. **Wycliffe is declared a heretic after his death**

Part 4: Short Answer

1. **Why was translating the Bible into English considered dangerous at the time?**

Because Church leaders feared losing control over religious teaching and believed people might misinterpret Scripture.

2. **Why do you think the Church wanted to control who could read Scripture?**

To maintain authority, prevent challenges to Church teachings, and keep religious power centralized.

(Answers may vary but should address **control, authority, and interpretation.**)

Part 5: Reflection

Option A: “Morning Star of the Reformation”

✓ Student should explain that Wycliffe’s ideas came before the Protestant Reformation and influenced later reformers by promoting Scripture as the highest authority and supporting Bible translation.

Option B: Bible Translation Impact

✓ Student should discuss how access to Scripture affects education, religion, personal belief, or freedom of thought.

(Grade for **thoughtfulness, clarity, and connection to the lesson**, not opinion.)

Optional Extension

✓ Any thoughtful question related to Wycliffe, Bible translation, Church authority, or the Reformation is acceptable.

Grading Suggestions (Optional)

- Vocabulary: 1 point each (7 points)
- Comprehension: 2 points each (14 points)
- Timeline: 6 points
- Short Answer: 2 points each (4 points)
- Reflection: 5–10 points (based on depth)

Total: ~36–41 points (adjust as desired)