



Why Henry VIII Split from the Roman Catholic Church

KS4 HISTORY

Ages 11-16 ⌚ 4 min read

The King Who Wanted a Divorce

In the **1530s**, **King Henry VIII** of **England** had a big problem. He was married to **Catherine of Aragon**, but their marriage wasn't producing a son — and Henry desperately wanted a male heir to rule England after him. So Henry asked the **Pope** (the head of the **Roman Catholic Church**) for permission to divorce Catherine and marry someone else.

But the Pope said no. The Catholic Church did not allow divorce, especially for kings. Henry was furious. He had been a loyal Catholic his whole life, but the Pope's refusal changed everything.

Think of it like a student asking their headteacher for special permission to break a school rule, and the headteacher refusing — so the student decides to leave school and start their own.

Breaking Away from Rome

Since the Pope wouldn't help, Henry made a radical decision. In **1534**, he declared himself the head of a brand new church: the **Church of England**. This meant England was no longer answering to **Rome** and the Catholic Church. Now **Henry VIII** was in charge of his own religion.

With this new power, Henry granted himself permission to divorce Catherine and marry **Anne Boleyn**. He got what he wanted, but at an enormous cost to his country.

Money and Power Too

Breaking from Rome wasn't just about one divorce. The Pope and the Catholic Church were incredibly wealthy and powerful in England. They owned huge amounts of land and collected taxes called **tithes** from ordinary people. When Henry split from Rome, he seized all this Church property and wealth for himself and the Crown.

Think of it like taking over your friend's piggy bank and deciding all their savings now belong to you.

This gave Henry huge financial power and made him even richer. It also meant the Pope had no more authority over England — **Henry VIII** now ruled both the country and its religion.

A Lasting Change

What started as one king's desire for a divorce became one of the most important religious events in **European history**. The break with Rome was shocking and violent — many people who refused to accept Henry's new church were executed. But it permanently changed England's religion and created a separate Protestant church that still exists today as the **Church of England** (also called the **Anglican Church**).