

102. The Enlightenment

“I will put enmity!”

These were God's words to Satan in Paradise.

The devil thought he had won when he made Adam and Eve sin. He believed that he had destroyed the work of God, as death was God's just punishment on sin.

However, God said: “I will put enmity!”

The devil had not counted on *that*! He had not won after all! God would send His Son to die for man so life could continue.

But Satan did not give up. He will *never* give up while this world exists.

Throughout all history, this battle continues to rage.

SATAN'S MANY ATTEMPTS.

Satan incited Cain to kill his brother Abel - but God gave Seth.

Satan incited the first world to turn their backs to the Lord - but God intervened and sent the flood,



The Flood, a deluge that swept everything away, except Noah and his family

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Satan incited the people to build the tower of Babel. However, one word from almighty God and... new languages confused the builders and completely stopped the tower project!

Satan incited many judges and kings to lead the people in idolatry. God punished them with the Babylonian exile but made a remnant return.



The tower of Babel, the top of which would reach the heavens.

Satan incited the people to a different kind of paganism. The Pharisees taught the people that salvation was the reward of obedience and good works. But God sent His Son to provide salvation for *free*.

Satan incited world rulers to persecute the Christian church. But God used that to make His church *grow*.

Satan incited the Roman Catholic Church to oppress the believers with false doctrine, but God sent Reformers to rediscover the beautiful truth of the Bible: Sola Scriptura, Sola Fide and Sola Gratia.

The entire history of the Church is one chain of war....war....and war again.

“I will put enmity!”

God's word to Satan is continually being fulfilled; enmity *came* in all shapes and forms.

This chapter will deal with another dangerous attack of the devil on the Church of the Lord. In the 18th century, a new conflict arose. This period in history, we know as '*The Enlightenment*.'

ENLIGHTENMENT

'*Enlightenment*', an unusual word. What has that got to do with unbelief? Everything! This 'Enlightenment' did not come from God, but from Satan.

The 18th century was a time of many discoveries



One of the first steam engines

and inventions. Scientists discovered laws of nature, such as gravity, they discovered planets, electricity and developed engines. All findings of which man previously had no idea.

"Don't you see," they said, "if people would only use their brains, they can do much more. People just need to use their *understanding*, their *reason*, then they can do anything! We don't believe the things from the past anymore. Using our mind, we discover that things are different." The many discoveries made the hearts of the scientists and scholars swell with pride.

"We have discovered that!"

Do you hear Satan's lie again: "You shall be like God!"? Oh, that devil of pride!

However, they forgot that all wisdom comes from *God*. The Lord *allowed* them to discover all those laws of nature. They should have seen God's creating hand in their discoveries and thank Him for revealing this to them. Instead, they said 'we, we have discovered that!'

The ordinary people were fascinated by these discoveries. They began to put their trust in

human intellect and *human* reason! But that was not all.

THE BIBLE ATTACKED

People also began to read the Bible with their *reason*. They no longer prayed for *God's* Spirit to enlighten and instruct them. Oh no, *man* was intelligent enough to read the Bible and to understand it. They began to apply the laws of nature to the Bible, and whatever did not agree with those laws was rejected.

Believe the many miracles recorded in the Bible? Oh, no, that did not happen! That was all nonsense! They no longer believed those miracles! They laughed them off. That the sun stood still for Joshua? *Impossible!* Who has ever seen the sun stand still? That the river in Egypt became blood? *Impossible!*

That Balaam's donkey talked? *Nonsense!* Who ever heard a donkey talk?

Impossible!

That contradicts the laws of nature!

That a tree grew and matured in one night and withered the next?

Nonsense! What fool would still believe that?

People *used to* swallow that nonsense, but now we have become too intelligent to accept *that* as truth!

That the angels sang in the fields of Ephrata? No one has ever heard an angel sing, so . . . *nonsense!* *Fairy tales!* The Bible is just telling stories.

That Jesus....

No, I must stop.

We know that God *did* perform those miracles as signs of His divine power! He revealed this in His Word.

"No way," said the scholars, "God has not revealed anything. They are all fables. People used to believe this because they were ignorant. Those fools!

We no longer believe that.

We know better.

We are more intelligent!

Our mind is 'enlightened'.

We live in the time of "*Enlightenment!*"

Terrible!

Yes, very terrible! For God's Word has *authority*! Because it *is* the Word of God and we must believe it unconditionally. The people of the Enlightenment said that the Church teaches those



Balaam and the Donkey.
Painted by Rembrandt van Rijn.

fables to control and manipulate the people. From this, we see that *unbelief* reigned!

At first, the upper-class were the only ones to think like this, but now it spread to the ordinary people as well; that made this period so dangerous.

But didn't the Church warn against this wicked doctrine?

Didn't the ministers warn the people?

No, they didn't! The Church had strayed away from the true faith. This unbelief even affected the ministers. True godliness could hardly be found anymore.

True, there were still children of God, even in those dark and difficult days. But they were ridiculed and laughed at! No-one paid any attention to their warnings. The Church had declined into superficial worship.

Of course, at first, they were still religious, but they served nature rather than God. They *said* they believed in a 'Supreme Being', and they

spoke of 'God's Providence'. The people had to be 'virtuous'. They had to live respectfully and flee from evil. They still believed in the immortality of the soul, of course! Virtue will have its *rewards* after this life and evil its *punishment*.

But they no longer believed that man is dead in sin, just imagine... Man was not *that* bad!

And the Lord Jesus, the suffering Saviour, Whose blood paid for the guilt of His people?

"Nonsense," said the enlightened people, "the Lord Jesus was only an example of true virtue." *Grace* was not needed.

Mankind only had to live decently; then everything would be fine. Prayer was not necessary! They no longer wanted to be dependent on God. And so I could go on.

It was even worse that this unbelief grew in the *Church* as well! The people no longer had reverence and respect for the Church and the Word of God. They only had regard for human intellect and reason! That was terrible!

Maybe you ask: "How did that happen? Where did the people suddenly get those wrong ideas?" We answer: "That did not come suddenly. That slowly developed that way!"

Do you want to know where all this came from? Listen!

WHERE IT BEGAN

The 'Enlightenment' originated in the Netherlands. What? In that country?

Oh, yes! The people in that country were known to be very tolerant. The Netherlands was a haven for many foreigners, who had fled their own country. That's how many clever, but wicked men settled in the Netherlands. They wrote books in which they mocked God and His Word.

From The Netherlands, the new ideas spread to England but did not have much impact there.

From England, the modern philosophy spread to France and yes, in France they accepted those blasphemous books. Unbelief flourished in the hearts of the French people. Do you know how that happened?

THE ENLIGHTENMENT IN FRANCE

In France, the king was the supreme ruler. The people had no rights. Even the situation in the Roman Catholic Church in France was terrible. The clergy lived in the greatest sins, yet they compelled the people to believe everything the Church taught. And whoever refused to do so was persecuted. Remember how terribly the Huguenots were oppressed and persecuted! The clergy even used force to make everyone acknowledge the Roman Catholic Church as the 'only-church-that saves!'

Around the year 1750 people were still being persecuted and killed. The wicked king and the godless Church worked together in this. The ordinary people lived in extreme poverty. The heavy taxes were a massive burden on them, but the king and his court lived in the most magnificent luxury. They wasted money, having one party after another. They threw money around like water. Where did all that money come from?

From the poor people.

They often had to eat dry bread and deny their children the essentials, while the king and his friends wasted their money most shamefully. They wallowed in wealth and luxury.

The poor also had to pay high church taxes, which allowed the Roman Catholic clergy to indulge in an extravagant lifestyle as well.

So, it is not surprising that resentment toward the king and Church grew in the hearts of the ordinary people. Eventually, they began to hate the king and the Church for their offensive behaviour! All love and respect for the royal house and the Church disappeared. Royalty and clergy were the reason that dissatisfaction and hatred began to grow in the hearts of millions of people who lived in the most wretched poverty. *They* were the reason that the people ripened for *revolution*!

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VOLTAIRE

Then wicked men came to France, who wrote books inciting the people to rebel against the royal house and the Church.

The name of one of those authors was *Voltaire*. He was the son of a lawyer and educated in a



Francois Voltaire 1694-1778

Jesuit school. What he learned and experienced there had made him rebellious. The authorities imprisoned him several times. Hatred toward the Church grew in his heart. He began to write books, wicked, revolutionary books, in which he ridiculed that which is most holy! Voltaire was a great scoffer. He even dared to ridicule the Lord Jesus.

He dared to write, 'The Lord Jesus is just a pale martyr on a cross!' What contempt is in these words! And there was much more blasphemy like that.

Thousands of people read those books, and that profane language poisoned their hearts. Voltaire also hated the Church. He wrote in his books, 'Crush the infamous one!' He meant: 'you must crush and annihilate the church!'

The oppressed people who read those books agreed with Voltaire. They said: 'Voltaire is right!'

In this way, Voltaire helped prepare the people of France for the revolution!

VOLTAIRE'S HORRID DEATH

Voltaire died in 1778. His deathbed was horrific. He experienced what it means to ridicule God and His Word.

Terror distorted his face. Terror? For what? For death! All his life, he had ridiculed God and His service. He had ridiculed death and eternity. He had poisoned the minds of millions of people. But when death came, cold sweat poured down his face. His eyes bulged.

When his friends came to visit, they shuddered when they saw the mortal fear in his eyes. God will not be ridiculed. Throughout his entire life, Voltaire acted as if God did not exist, but on his deathbed, he experienced that God most certainly *does* exist. God's wrath burned his soul. He cried out in terror, anxiety, and horror. That's how he died and was summoned before God's judgment seat.

Then he experienced the truth of God's Word when it says: *'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.'*

A French doctor wrote: 'It would be good if all those people who read his books also witnessed his death.'

Sometimes we can be indifferent and scornful too. We can learn from this to be careful and remember that God will judge every offensive word.

ROUSSEAU

Rousseau was another author with much influence. "No," said he, "not reason, nor our intellect gives true happiness. Despite the Enlightenment, millions of people are still living in the greatest misery. What have all those discoveries and inventions given to them? Nothing! Hatred and envy live in the hearts of so many."

He wrote: "If people really want to be happy, then they must return to nature! In the early days,

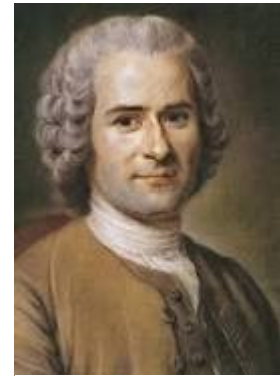
when there were not so many inventions, people were much happier. Just let the young children grow up naturally! Let them do as they please! If they misbehave, they will have to bear the consequences."

Rousseau began to worship nature as a god.

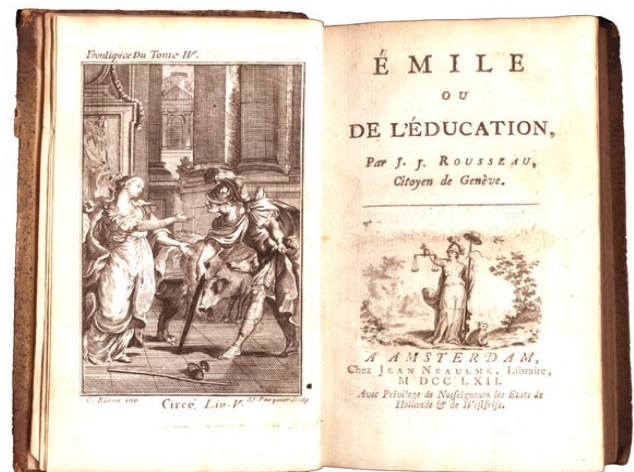
He taught: 'Children are born without sin, they are like a clean sheet of paper. You can write good things or bad things on that sheet of paper. The child must develop the natural good within itself. Therefore, keep the child away from badly behaving people as much as possible.'

We know that Rousseau was wrong. A child is conceived and born in sin and inclined to all evil. For a child to be happy and well behaved, he or she must be born again.

Rousseau was also a false prophet who led the people to destruction. Just like Voltaire, he



Francois Rousseau
1712 - 1778



In this book 'Emile', Rousseau explained how a child must be kept away from bad behaviour so it would grow up to be a 'good' citizen

prepared them for the revolution. Both have sown terrible seed into the hearts of millions of people, and *that* seed has germinated and borne fruit, terrible fruit.

For example, one of the members of the French government, a certain Mr. Cloutz, always wrote behind his name, '*Personal enemy of Jesus of Nazareth!*'

Frightening, isn't it? Man certainly dares to do foolish things! But also, here applies, 'He Who sits in heaven laughs.'

THE ENLIGHTENMENT SPREADS

The spirit of Enlightenment also penetrated Germany. Men arose who deceived the people with their blasphemous writings; more false doctrine appeared. They dared to deny Christ's resurrection, saying that the disciples made it up. In Germany too, the truth and authority of God's Word were undermined.

We see that the Enlightenment spread through many European countries. One country was worse than another, but that same destructive spirit appeared everywhere: total denial of God's Holy Word.

They tried to push the Church aside.
They tried to push God's Word aside.
They even tried to push God aside!

'You shall be like God,' says Satan and man listens and believes him!

Man wants to be in charge himself and rejects any higher Authority!

But God does not allow Himself to be pushed aside. He rules and continues to rule. Despite and through all the wickedness of man, He achieves His purpose. God never makes a mistake! He cares for His Church, also in those dark times. As always, He is in control of all things.

The Church should have opposed those foolish ideas and called the people to repentance, but she failed in that. Yet God did not disown or forsake her.

Through the 'Enlightenment' and the following Revolution, Satan tried to destroy God's Church with one fell swoop. He was not successful! It had to fail, for God had promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against her, and His promises remain true.

We just mentioned 'The Revolution'.

What Revolution?

That's for the next chapter.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by the term 'Enlightenment'?
2. How did this period come about?
3. How did this movement affect the way people read their Bible?
4. Explain why trust in the 'laws of nature' led to unbelief in the miracles of God's Word.
5. Why might this age be called the 'triumph of unbelief'?
6. Describe the condition of the Church at this time.
7. How did the 'enlightened people' view the following:
 - a. God
 - b. virtue
 - c. prayer
 - d. divinity of Jesus
 - e. immortality of the soul
 - f. depravity of man
8. Describe the situation of ordinary people in France.
9. Why did the ordinary people resent the king and the Church?
10. What did Voltaire teach?
11. How did Voltaire die?
12. What did Rousseau teach?
13. How did both men pave the way for the French Revolution?
14. How was the Enlightenment an attempt to push God off His throne?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. One of the off shoots of the Enlightenment was Deism. This doctrine says that God does not trouble Himself with the affairs of men but wound this world up like a clock and allows it to unwind by itself. Find two texts to prove this philosophy to be entirely wrong.
2. Are the teachings of the Enlightenment *more* or *less* dangerous to the Church than the persecutions which we studied? Why?