

## 83. God's Vengeance and the Edict of Nantes

**C**harles IX, king of France, is sleeping peacefully.

Peacefully?

Watch!

He smiles, but then his face is suddenly distorted by fear. He lifts his hand as if to ward something off.

"No ... No! ..." he cries with a smothered voice.

Restlessly he tosses and turns.

He kicks and thrashes his arms around wildly. He wakes up with a scream and looks around, confused. Sweat drips from his face. His whole body shakes and trembles. His terrified eyes search the bedroom.

This ordeal returns night after night.

The bloodshed at the massacre of the Huguenots haunts him. After that fateful night, he has not had a moment's rest. His conscience accuses and condemns him.

Even during the day, he is tormented by indescribable fear and terror. He sees ghosts surrounding him. He cringes, shudders and trembles. Oh, the spirits of those murdered Huguenots haunt him! He is sure of it!

Dreadful, terrifying dreams wear him down every night and rob him of his sleep. Day and night, he lives in constant fear. That stressful life affects his health. What do you expect! He roams restlessly through the palace like a phantom. His haunted eyes lie deep in their sockets. His body is wasting away till he is only skin over bones.



*Charles IX, 1550-1574. Portrait painted by Francois Clouet.*

His life becomes a burden. His life is hell on earth! God shows that He is an *Avenger*! Less than two years after the massacre of St. Bartholomew, Charles IX dies, emaciated and exhausted, and is summoned before God's judgment seat. How terrible to appear before God like that!

### FROM DISHONOUR TO HONOUR

For a few days after the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, the beheaded body of the noble De Coligny remained hanging on the gallows, but not for long. We don't know who dared to remove his body from the gallows, but it happened. His daughter, the courageous Louise de Coligny - whose husband, a doctor, was also murdered on Batholomew's night - took her father's mutilated body with her when she fled to The Netherlands. He was buried there, but in 1608, some thirty years later, his body was brought back to France and re-buried on his estate. Just after his murder in 1572, a pillar of disgrace had been erected on his estate, declaring his family dishonourable! In 1886, some 300 years later, that same Paris honoured him and unveiled his statue in the inner court of the protestant cathedral so that all would remember him. When in 1912, the Dutch queen Wilhelmina visited Paris, she placed a wreath at the foot of that statue.

Queen Wilhelmina was a descendant of Gaspard De Coligny.

Louise De Coligny, daughter of Gaspard De Coligny, married Prince William of Orange, or William the Silent, in 1583. She became the mother of Frederick Henry.



*Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands (1880-1962)*

Here we see the truth of God's Word: "Those who honour Me, I will honour!"

### THE WAR OF THE THREE HENRYS

When King Charles IX died, his plans to exterminate the Huguenots died with him. The Roman Catholics had managed to murder 'only' one-tenth of them. True, many of the Huguenot nobility and prominent leaders had fallen. The loss of Gaspard de Coligny was an irreparable blow for the Huguenots. The remaining nine-tenth embittered Huguenots armed themselves throughout the country, and civil war broke out

again. They fought bitterly, with some successes for each side.

After Charles IX, his brother Henry III became king.



Henry III,  
1542 - 1589

Henry of Navarre became the leader of the Huguenots. After the Bartholomew's night, the wicked family De' Medici had compelled him to become Roman Catholic. Later he revoked that and joined the Huguenots again.



Henry de Guise  
Wikipedia

Henry de Guise, the murderer of Gaspard De Coligny, made a strong alliance with the most prominent Roman Catholic nobles and turned against Henry III, the king of France. That way, there were three parties in France.



Henry de Navarre  
(Henry IV) Wikipedia

King Henry III and his friends were one party. Henry de Guise, who had allied with Philip II of Spain, was the second party. The Huguenots were the third party, with Henry of Navarre as their leader. Those three parties fought each

other. Because a man named Henry led each party, they called this war: '*The War of the Three Henrys.*' We could tell you much about that war, but we would never get done. We shall mention a few facts.

Over time, the two Roman Catholic groups, namely Henry III, the king, and Henry de Guise, the leader of an alliance of Roman Catholic nobles, made a truce. Then they marched together to fight against the Huguenots, led by Henry of Navarre.

Henry de Guise, the Roman Catholic duke, thought he was the boss. He was exceptionally power-hungry and would have gladly ruled over France. He even tried to boss the king around and succeeded to the extent that not King Henry III but Henry de Guise had the most power.

Finally, it became so bad that the king could no longer tolerate it and had Henry de Guise murdered. A stab with a dagger put an end to his sinful life. That's how King Henry III avenged the blood of Gaspard de Coligny because Henry de Guise had murdered de Coligny. He had stood waiting outside till his men had thrown the corpse of de Coligny out of the window so his horse could trample on it.

The French king went to his mother, the wicked Catherine De' Medici.

"Mother," he said, "now I am king alone again because I had Henry de Guise murdered".

"My son," she answered with a smile, "you must also have Charles de Guise, his uncle, murdered. Otherwise, you are still not safe."

The king promptly followed his mother's advice. He immediately ordered Charles de Guise's arrest and had that powerful duke murdered.

Fourteen days later, Catherine De' Medici died. No one mourned her death. She died without having enjoyed the love of her people. God summoned her before His judgment seat. Her godless life was over.

The Roman Catholic nobles were furious when they heard that the king had murdered both de Guises because now they were without their leaders. They planned revenge. The Jesuits also stirred up the Roman Catholic nobles against their monarch. A few months later, a monk plunged his dagger into the heart of the French king. His was an act of revenge.



Charles de Guise.  
Wikipedia



Catherine De'  
Medici.  
Wikipedia

That's how Henry III also fell at the hands of a murderer.

All these people were the chief offenders of the Huguenot massacre during the notorious St. Bartholomew Night. Remarkably, they all fell at the hands of murderers.

Indeed, there is a God Who lives, and on this earth, His sentence gives!

The Lord is no idle Bystander but will destroy the wicked in His time. We see that confirmed in this history.

### HENRY OF NAVARRE

The confusion in France was incredible. Charles IX is dead; he died a miserable death. His brother and successor Henry III are dead.

Catherine de Medici is dead.

Henry de Guise is dead.

His uncle Charles de Guise is dead.

Not one member of the ancient royal house remained to rule France. And so, in 1589, Henry of Navarre, the leader of the Huguenots, became king of France.

Who would ever have thought that ?!

But the Roman Catholic party, which was very powerful, said:

"What?! Henry of Navarre, a *Huguenot*, as king? No way! We will not dream of accepting that heretic as king!"

Henry of Navarre fought for four years, but he made no headway. The Roman Catholic part of the population rebelled against him. Paris locked its gates and refused to receive him. So the war continued.

And then?

Something terrible happened.

Something that would have made Satan laugh!

Henry of Navarre, the leader of the Huguenots, became Roman Catholic again! This time he didn't do it under compulsion to save his life but voluntarily to secure the crown. He said:

"Paris is worth a mass to me."

He meant: "If I become Roman Catholic, then Paris will undoubtedly open its gates for me." That's why he ceremoniously became a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

And yes. Henry got what he wanted. Paris did open their gates. The people of the French capital would not receive a Protestant king, but they had no problems with a Roman Catholic king!

This act of Henry of Navarre showed that he was not a God-fearing man. He despised the heavenly crown so that he could wear the earthly crown. He was, in fact, an apostate! However, we may say one thing about him: he never persecuted the Huguenots, his former fellow believers.

He was no longer known as Henry of Navarre but as Henry IV.

Immediately after his coronation, he tried to end the bloody Huguenot war. And he succeeded.

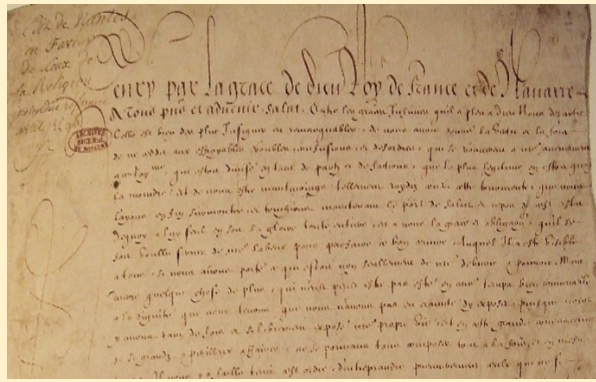
In 1598 a conference between the Roman Catholics and the Huguenots took place in Nantes, a large seaport in France. Those two parties signed a peace treaty there. Because that treaty was signed in Nantes, they called it the *Edict of Nantes*. 'Edict' is another word for 'treaty'.

This Edict of Nantes was very favourable for the Huguenots. First, they received *freedom of*



King Henry IV triumphantly enters Paris after he returned to Roman Catholicism a year earlier. Painting by Francois Gerard 1817  
[https://www.herodote.net/22\\_mars\\_1594-evenement](https://www.herodote.net/22_mars_1594-evenement)





The terms of the Edict granted liberty of conscience to all Huguenots throughout France. Specified towns were allowed to build churches for Protestant worship. Some nobles were even permitted to hold services in their homes. Recognized Huguenot pastors were paid by the government. A five-mile exclusion zone was placed around Paris, however, preventing Huguenot influence in that city. Civil concessions were also granted enabling some Huguenots to hold official positions. The four universities of Montauban, Montpellier, Sedan and Saumur were allowed to come under Protestant influence. A court known as the Chambre de l'Edict was set up to give Huguenots representation in a parliament and, as a guarantee of protection, 100 fortified cities were given to them for eight years.

Though the provisions of the Edict were never fully carried out, it did produce a remarkable period of peace and stability, even of slow economic progress, in which Huguenots were able to flourish. These were days when the gospel had free course, the true church of God grew, and the Huguenot universities became strongholds of Protestant theology. This period of respite was, however, short-lived. It was only twelve years old when, in 1610, Henry IV was assassinated by a monk, Francois Ravallac.

conscience and freedom of religion. So, no matter where they lived, no one would be persecuted because of his faith. That was exceptional because "freedom of conscience" was *not* given in any other Roman Catholic country. Rome does not want to know about freedom of conscience. The pope would not have been happy with this edict.

Secondly, the Huguenots also obtained the right to establish their own churches and schools. Those schools were essential because the children received instruction in the pure doctrine of salvation there.

Thirdly, they were permitted to exercise their Reformed religion freely.

The courts of justice must consist of fifty per cent Huguenots so they would not suffer from the unfair hatred and arbitrariness of the Roman Catholic judges. The Huguenots were even allowed to serve in public offices. That meant that they could hold office in national and state governments.

And finally, they received some towns as security. The most important of those Huguenot cities was *La Rochelle*, an important seaport on the West coast of France. Because they were given those cities, the Huguenots formed a little separate state, a state *within* the state. *At last*, the Huguenots obtained rest after so many years of war and oppression! Finally, they could assemble undisturbed and go to church without fear.

During the reign of Henry of Navarre, or Henry IV, France slowly recovered from the devastations caused by the Huguenot wars.

The Edict of Nantes was signed against the wishes of the pope. The Jesuits never forgave Henry IV. They continued to stir up strife and incite the Roman Catholic people against their king. Their secret underhanded stirring succeeded in 1610.

That year, a monk called Francois Ravallac murdered king Henry IV. He was not a God-fearing king, for he led a sinful life. He wasn't a steadfast ruler either because he changed his religion repeatedly. But he has been an instrument in the hand of God to give a time of rest to the severely tried Huguenots.

Through all this, we see God maintaining His church.

We just wrote, "The Huguenots obtained a time of rest." So, not a permanent rest from persecution? Sadly not! After some time, dark clouds gathered above the heads of the Huguenots again. More about that later.



*Assassination of King Henry IV, 1610. Painter: Charles Gustave Housez, 1860. Wikipedia.*

## WAR AGAIN!

October 1627.

The gates of the Huguenot city La Rochelle are closed. Tough soldiers with primed guns stand on guard on the sturdy walls. Their sharp eyes rove across the countryside because a strong army surrounds the city from the land side. La Rochelle is being besieged.

War again? Regrettably, yes!

Seventeen years ago, a fanatical monk murdered Henry IV. Louis XIII became king in his place. His prime minister was Cardinal Richelieu. This cardinal was an able but crafty statesman. His main aim was to make France powerful and great again and to bring honour and fame to the royal house.

We know that the Huguenots had received various cities. They formed a state *within* the state. That situation was a thorn in the eye of Cardinal Richelieu. It was bad enough that the Huguenots had obtained freedom of religion through the Edict of Nantes, but that the Huguenots even received some strong cities? No, Richelieu could not tolerate that!

That was too much! Besides, they could become a danger to France if war broke out. Just imagine that if war *did* break out, the Huguenots would choose the side of France's enemies! Then France would have the enemy within its borders! That would be a problem! They had to nip this possibility in the bud at all costs!

That's why Richelieu slowly took one city after another away from them. Although the Huguenots resisted, there was no true unity among them. What a pity that there were so many divisions among them. We saw what that did for Germany, and now the same is happening in France. Isn't it the same these days?

And now, in 1627, Richelieu had laid siege around La Rochelle, the last Huguenot city. That last Huguenot city must also fall, then they will have averted the possibility of internal betrayal. But the Huguenots defended themselves bravely. They had no intention of giving up their last stronghold.

Weeks and months slowly passed. 1627 became 1628. La Rochelle stood firm because the seaside to the beleaguered fortress was still open, and from that side, provisions, weapons and soldiers could get into the Huguenot city. Richelieu realised that the seaside had to be closed to conquer La Rochelle. As it was now, the fortress could hold out for years. He had to break the resistance of the Huguenots. And then? Something awful happened.



*Cardinal Richelieu. Wikipedia*

The Dutch fleet helped block La Rochelle from the seaside. Perhaps you are surprised and think: 'Why would they do that? Weren't the Dutch also Huguenots?' Yes, they were! But the Netherlands were still involved in their severe struggle with Spain. The Eighty Years' War was still raging. They had driven the Spaniards out of their country but were still fighting. Besides, rumours were doing the rounds in the Netherlands about a large fleet Spain was preparing against the Netherlands. And now that crafty Richelieu made it seem like he would help



and support the Dutch in their struggle against Spain. That French offer of help was very attractive to the Dutch government. With French assistance, they could soon force Spain to make peace. But in exchange for that help, the Netherlands must help Richelieu to conquer La Rochelle. The French cardinal assured them he had no intention to persecute the Huguenots again. Not at all! His only aim was to break the *political* power of the Huguenots—no more.

He did not want to interfere with their religion at all. The Edict of Nantes would remain in force. He only wished to reclaim their cities. There was nothing against that, was there?

This offer of help resulted in the States-General of the Netherlands sending a fleet to France to completely block La Rochelle from the seaside so that the supply of provisions would be made impossible to the last stronghold of the Huguenots.

The Huguenots were understandably indignant. That move by the Dutch was not necessary. Even without the support of France, the Netherlands could have compelled Spain to make peace. The Lord had wonderfully helped the Netherlands and kept them standing. Must the help of France now be accepted at such a price? In church services everywhere, the people prayed for the Huguenots. The sailors did not wish to follow such wicked orders. However, the government pushed it through. Those sailors had to obey.

According to some writers, the Dutch fleet came too late and did not cooperate in the fall of La Rochelle. According to them, the city had surrendered before the Dutch ships arrived.

But according to the historian Fruytier, the Dutch ships *were* used to overthrow La Rochelle. Whatever the case, the Dutch government did make the fleet ready

against the city of La Rochelle. That was a crying shame.

The English sent provisions, gunpowder, and bullets to La Rochelle.

Then Richelieu cut off the city by building a dam in the sea, which finally caused famine to reign in the beleaguered city.

Yet the Huguenots still held out.

But the distress mounted. People died daily from a lack of food. According to some, three hundred died in one day. Finally, hunger forced the city to surrender. In October 1628, La Rochelle opened its gates. Richelieu, with his victorious army, marched into the city and celebrated the Papal Mass in one of the Protestant churches. What a blow for the Huguenots!

After La Rochelle's surrender, Cardinal Richelieu kept his word by not openly persecuting the Huguenots. They retained their religious liberty. But he had broken their political power, which was a heavy blow to them. Since then, Rome constantly annoyed and bullied them, and they couldn't do anything about it. Ultimately this contributed to them finally perishing in a sea of blood and tears.

More about that in the next chapter.



*Siege of La Rochelle. Military Wiki*

## QUESTIONS

1. How did the Lord take vengeance on the king's actions?
2. Identify Louise de Coligny. What happened to the mortal remains of de Coligny?
3. Identify the three Henrys: a. Henry III.  
b. Henry of Navarre. c. Henry de Guise.
4. What was the 'War of the Three Henrys'?
5. Why were Henry de Guise and Charles de Guise murdered?
6. Describe the death of Catherine.
7. How did Henry III die?
8. What lesson should we learn from these deaths?
9. Explain what Henry meant when he said: "Paris is worth a mass to me."
10. Why do we believe Henry was not a true Huguenot at heart?
11. List the four benefits given to Protestants in the Edict of Nantes.
12. How did God use Henry IV to aid the Huguenots?
13. Identify Cardinal Richelieu.
14. What was Richelieu's policy regarding the Huguenots?
15. Why did the Dutch assist Richelieu?
16. What effect did the fall of La Rochelle have on the Huguenots?

	exterminate the Protestants. Someone stabbed me in my bed during St. Bartholomew's Massacre.
	I supported German Protestants because I disliked Charles V so much.
	I took cities away from the Huguenots to weaken their political power.
	I was commander-in-chief of the Huguenot army in the early years.
	I was king of France for one year.
	I changed religions readily for political advantage.
	I was the third son of Catherine to become king. I ordered the murder of the de Guise uncle and nephew.
	I feared for the spiritual welfare of my son while residing at the royal court.
	I declared the massacre to be a disgraceful act.
	I rejoiced at the Massacre of St. Bartholomew and ordered the coining of a commemoration medal.

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Read Job 20. Relate this chapter to the life of Charles IX.
2. Read Hebrews 10:26-27. Explain these verses as they connect with the end of the king's life. Why was Charles IX the one to feel the anger of the Lord most keenly?
3. Find one text to show that Henry IV's behaviour was not consistent with the life of a Christian.

## REVIEW

Who am I?

	I am from a royal family in Florence, Italy. I desire to
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## RESEARCH TOPICS

1. Construct a timeline of the following events: Edict of Nantes; Massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day; Massacre of Vassy; Fall of La Rochelle; Death of Charles IX; Death of Francis I; Henry's pact with Philip II to exterminate heretics; Ascension of Henry IV to the throne; Wedding of Henry of Navarre and Margaret.
2. Read the account of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew in Foxe's Book of Martyrs.
  - a. Give a brief sketch of an individual who escaped death due to an extraordinary favour
  - b. Write an account of the continuation of massacres in France after the killings in Paris.