



CHAPTER 4: Revolution in France

Chapter Overview

- By the mid 18th century, France was near bankruptcy. Social injustice, heavy taxation of the lower classes, special privileges given to the aristocracy, the ambitions of the middle class—these and other ills made France ripe for a revolution.
- King Louis XVI called an Estates-General to solve the problem of France’s looming bankruptcy. When the estates met, the Third Estate seized power and formed itself into the National Assembly, claiming to be the sovereign authority of France.
- The storming of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, marked the first great triumph of the revolution over the ancient regime.
- The National Assembly and then the National Convention worked to create a new constitution for France—a constitutional monarchy. The fruit of these labors was the Constitution of 1791. The National Assembly drew up as well a statement of human rights, called the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.
- The National Convention passed its first anti-Catholic measure, the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, to bring the Catholic Church fully under the control of the government and to give the government the ability to seize Church property. The *Civil Constitution* alienated Catholics and clergy from the revolution and led to outbreaks of revolt against the government.
- King Louis XVI deeply opposed the revolution, because it undermined what he thought was his God-given authority as king and attacked the Church. Hoping to lead a resistance against the revolutionary government, he attempted to flee to Germany. But before he could reach safety, he was captured by French authorities and forced to return to Paris.
- Because of the king’s attempted flight to Germany, extremists at a rally held on Paris’s *Champ de Mars* demanded that he be tried for treason. The National Guard fired upon the crowd. This came to be known as the Massacre of the *Champ de Mars*.
- War was declared between the Holy Roman Empire and Prussia on one side and France on the other. Thinking King Louis XVI had betrayed his people, a mob forced the royal family to flee from the Tuileries Palace. The French Legislative Assembly then abolished the monarchy, replacing the king with an executive council of deputies.
- The French victory at the Battle of Valmy ended the allies’ war against France.

Chapter Goals

This chapter tells the story of one of the pivotal events in history—the French Revolution. Like other revolutions, the French Revolution was inspired by deep societal problems. It was a purging of pent-up grievances. The French Revolution, thus, is an important case study in revolution itself—what causes revolution and what its results tend to be. We will see the results of the French Revolution in subsequent chapters, while this chapter focuses more on the causes.

- Students should be shown how the problems of France in the 18th century coalesced with the ideas of the Enlightenment to bring about the revolution and, thus, how ideas, not just material events, have consequences. It is not just material causes that make society what it is, but ideas. Indeed, the same problems addressed under the inspiration of different ideas than those that actually inspired the French Revolution could have led to very different results
- Students should see the centrality of human personalities as the cause of events. For instance, how would have events played out differently if France had had a more decisive king than Louis XVI?
- Students should understand how the ideals of the French Revolution—especially as enshrined in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*—are the ideals that inspire Western Civilization in our time.
- Students should understand how the French revolutionary government’s treatment of the Church was rooted both in Enlightenment ideas as well as longstanding Church and state relations.

Period Music

Please consult the list of composers in Chapter 2 of this teacher’s manual.

What Students Should Know

1. What were the problems in France that led to the French Revolution

- The government was too centralized under the king.
- The king’s government had broken the political power of the nobles without removing their privileges.
- Though they had hardly any function in society, nobles still demanded dues and services from the peasants and restricted their liberty to hunt and fish.
- Local and royal taxes, tithes, as well as service burdens, fell almost entirely on the peasants. Royal services, such as the *corvée*, made peasants neglect their own farms and practice poor cultivation. Nobles paid few taxes, and the Church only what it decided to contribute.
- The cities, especially Paris, swelled with poor who were full of bitterness against the aristocracy and the government.
- The government in France was spending more money than it was taking in in taxes and faced bankruptcy.

2. Who the bourgeoisie were and why they were ready for revolution

The bourgeoisie were the middle class—merchants, bankers, shopkeepers, and professional men, such as lawyers and doctors. Some were immensely rich, while others had more moderate wealth, while still others had very modest incomes. The French bourgeoisie wanted

Key Terms at a Glance

regalia: the emblems and symbols of royal authority (crown, scepter, robes, etc.)

tithe: small tax or contribution—originally, the tenth part of something, paid as a tax or contribution

bourgeoisie: (boor-zhwa-ZEE) the middle class or a social order dominated by the middle class. A person of the middle class is *bourgeois* (boor-ZHWA).

electoral college: a group or body of electors who cast votes for elected officials

commune: a corporation or body of officials that governs a town or city

ancient regime: the political and social system of Europe before the French Revolution

suspensive veto: by giving a *veto* (Latin, meaning “I refuse”) to a bill, a king or head of government refuses to sign it into law. A *suspensive veto* is the power only to delay the process of a bill becoming a law. If, after a certain number of times, a head of government refuses to sign a bill, it becomes law anyhow.

department: a political region (like a county or state) instituted by the French revolutionary government

nonjuror: a clergyman who refused to take an oath to support the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*

execute: (in law) to sign bills so that they become laws. Someone who executes laws is called the *executive*. In the British government, the executive was the king; in the United States government, the executive is the president.

suffrage: the right to vote in political elections

indirect vote: a vote cast not for a candidate for a public office but for an elector, who in turn votes for the candidate favored by the voters

proletariat: the poorest class; the working class, especially of the cities

counterrevolutionary: someone who leads or participates in a counterrevolution—a revolution directed to overthrowing a government or system set up by a previous revolution

governmental reforms. They wanted a greater share in the government of the kingdom. They looked to Great Britain as their ideal of freedom until the founding of the United States, a republic based on the ideals of Liberal thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau. The bourgeoisie was, thus, greatly affected by Liberalism.

3. What events led to the French Revolution

- To solve the French government’s bankruptcy crisis, King Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General at Versailles for May 1789.
- Under the influence of its Liberal leaders, the Third Estate (commons) insisted that the First Estate (the clergy) and the Second Estate (nobility) form one assembly with it. When the king refused to allow this, the Third Estate established itself as the National Assembly—the sole representative of the French people. When, at last, the king saw the National Assembly was

gaining influence and power, he recognized it on June 27, 1789.

- King Louis XVI was determined to end the revolution and called in his German mercenary regiments to Paris. This, and the dismissal of the finance minister, Jacques Necker, inspired an uprising among the poor of Paris. On July 14, 1789, about 1,000 armed men and women assaulted and captured a fortress, the Bastille. The next day, the king again gave in to revolutionary demands.

4. What the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* was and said

The *Declaration* was a decree issued by the French National Assembly on August 26, 1789. Drawing on the ideas of Rousseau, it made Enlightenment Liberalism the philosophy of the state. It made the following declarations:

- The law expresses the general will of the people; the people are sovereign and all political power comes from them.
- All citizens are equal. “Men are born and remain free and equal in rights,” it said.
- The purpose of government is to preserve “the natural and imprescriptible rights of man . . . life, liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.”
- Citizens have the right speak their ideas and opinions and the right to religious freedom.

5. Why the National Assembly decided to confiscate Church property; what other measures it undertook against the Church; what effects these measures had

The National Assembly confiscated the Church’s property in France because it had not solved the financial crisis. The Assembly thought the Church’s wealth could save the

government from bankruptcy. Among other measures the National Assembly undertook against the Church are the following:

- It suppressed religious houses and monasteries throughout France.
- On July 12, 1790, it issued the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, in which it removed (except in matters of doctrine) the French Church entirely out from under the authority of the pope.

The *Civil Constitution* and other anticlerical measures had the effect of turning many of the French, who had formerly supported it against the revolution. It caused divisions within the French Church, for most of the bishops and over half of the priests refused to swear an oath to the *Civil Constitution*. The official state Church, thus, went into schism.

6. What the Constitution of 1791 was

The Constitution of 1791 was the first written constitution of the French revolutionary government. As a constitutional monarchy, it kept the king as head of state, or the executive, but gave him scarcely any power. Instead, the one-house legislature, the Legislative Assembly, held the supreme lawmaking power in the government. The constitution was not democratic, for it gave the suffrage only to taxpaying and property-owning citizens—and then, they only had an indirect vote: a vote cast not for a candidate but for an elector who, in turn, voted for a candidate.

7. Who the opponents of the Constitution of 1791 were

The opponents of the Constitution of 1791 were those, such as the royalists, who wanted to return to the ancient regime, the political and social system of Europe before the French Revolution. They included members of the nobility and of the clergy, but also peasants

who were angry about the government's attacks on religion. Other opponents thought the constitution was not revolutionary enough; they wanted a democratic republic without any state church. These included the Cordeliers, led by Georges Danton, and the Jacobins, led by Maximilien Robespierre.

8. Why King Louis XVI conspired against the French revolutionary government

King Louis XVI thought the French revolutionary government had unjustly seized power from him. He saw that, as the king, he had received his authority from God and thus thought that no one could justly take it from him. A devout Catholic, he objected to the anticlerical legislation of both the National Assembly and the Legislative Assembly.

9. How the republic was founded

In the war the allied powers of the European monarchies were waging against France, the French armies were suffering many defeats. The extremist revolutionaries were certain the king was conspiring against them and was in contact with the enemy. On August 9, 1792, Danton and other extremist leaders seized control of Paris's city government, the commune, and on the following day led thousands of Parisians in an assault on the Tuileries palace. The king, the queen, and the dauphin fled to the chambers of the Legislative Assembly, where the delegates voted to depose Louis. Thus ended the government under the Constitution of 1791. It was replaced by a republican government, with a legislative assembly and an executive council.

10. The importance of the Battle of Valmy

At the battle of Valmy, fought on September 20, 1792, the Prussians failed to drive the French from the hill of Valmy. Over the next week, Danton's agents negotiated for the withdrawal

of the Allied troops from France. On September 30, the Allies agreed to withdrawal. The republic was saved.

Questions for Review

1. How did medieval French government differ from the French government under Louis XVI?

The government of France under Louis XVI was highly centralized. The king was the absolute authority in France. The nobles were reduced to powerless ornaments of the royal court. In the Middle Ages, however, the king was nowhere as powerful as he was under Louis XVI. Nobles were quite powerful and, sometimes, more powerful than the king himself. The government was decentralized; the king shared power with the nobles and the Church. The Estates-General represented the three estates of France—the clergy, the aristocracy, and the commoners. It advised the king and could influence the king's decisions. Each province in France had its local assembly of the Estates that had local administrative authority. *Parlements*, or regional courts, too, had local administrative duties.

2. Why would French peasants have been discontent in the years before the French Revolution?

French peasants were discontent in the years before the French Revolution because they bore heavy burdens and had little freedom to better their lot. Though they themselves had hardly any function in society, nobles still demanded dues and service from the peasants and restricted their liberty to hunt and fish. Local and royal taxes, Church tithes, as well as service burdens fell almost entirely on the peasants. Royal services, such as the *corvée*,

forced peasants to neglect their own farms and so practice poor cultivation.

Why was the *bourgeoisie* discontent?

The *bourgeoisie* were a dynamic class of society that was looking forward to changes in society that would benefit their class. They wanted a greater share in the government of the kingdom. They were deeply influenced by Liberalism and favored reforms that would introduce a kind of parliamentary system into France, the removal of restrictions on business, and freedom of thought and religion.

3. What changes in government did the Third Estate want the Estates-General of 1789 to make?

In their *cahiers* sent to the king, the Third Estate called for Liberal reforms to the government. They wanted freedom for the press, taxes that were more just, and equality for all classes in France. They wanted a part in directing the future of France.

4. Why did the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* not mention the Catholic Church?

The *Declaration* did not mention the Catholic Church because the document's authors were Liberals who wanted to diminish and even erase the role of the Church in French society. A very large number of the members of the National Assembly, which drew up and approved the Declaration, were not Catholics but Deists or Freemasons.

5. What measures did the National Assembly take against the Church?

The National Assembly took the following measures against the Church:

a) It confiscated and brought under state control all the lands belonging to the Church.

b) It suppressed religious orders and monasteries and forbade anyone to take religious vows.

c) In the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*, it removed papal authority in the choice of bishops, who were henceforth to be elected; it abolished dioceses. Thus, the Assembly brought the French Catholic Church into schism.

d) It demanded that all priests and bishops take an oath of loyalty to the *Civil Constitution* and forbade those who refused to take the oath to function as priests. Bishops who refused were to be deposed.

6. How did the Girondins and the Feuillants differ?

The Feuillants favored a constitutional monarchy like the one established by the Constitution of 1791; indeed, they supported this constitution. They supported the Constitutional Church. They were thus the “conservatives” and sat on the right side of the Assembly hall.

The Girondins favored the overthrow of the monarchy and an end to all state religion. They sat on the left side of the Assembly Hall and opposed the Constitution of 1791.

7. What were the reasons King Louis XVI, the Girondins, and the Feuillants each had for going to war?

King Louis XVI wanted to go to war because he hoped that allied monarchies would overthrow the revolutionary government and restore his absolute rule over France.

The Feuillants wanted to go to war because they thought it would unite France like nothing else could.

The Girondins wanted war because they saw it as an opportunity to spread the revolution to all the oppressed peoples of Europe.

Ideas in Action

1. Research the life of Marie Antoinette. Was she as frivolous as has been claimed? What other qualities, both good and bad, did she have?

This chapter and the next, as well as Chapter 2, contain information on Marie Antoinette that could help guide students in this activity. However, students should still consult outside sources.

2. Imagine that you are a French priest who has learned about the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* but wants to remain faithful to the Church. Write a diary of your struggles to remain faithful to God, the Church, your parish, and your country.

3. Imagine that you are a French peasant or a member of the middle class at the time of the French Revolution. Write an account of why you would support the revolution, or why you would not.

4. Make a detailed map of the city of Paris at the time of the French Revolution. Show these key locations: the Bastille, Notre Dame cathedral, government buildings, and royal houses.

Since Paris was the vibrant center of the revolution, this activity could help students deepen their understanding of the events in this and subsequent chapters. Geography is the handmaiden of history.

Sample Quiz I (pages 91–101)

Please answer the following in complete sentences.

1. List three of the problems in France that led to the French Revolution.
2. Who were the bourgeoisie?
3. Give one reason the French bourgeoisie were ready for revolution.
4. What group in France belonged to the First Estate? Who belonged to the Second Estate? Who belonged to the Third Estate?
5. Why did King Louis XVI call a meeting of the Estates-General?
6. By calling itself the National Assembly, what was the Third Estate claiming to be?
7. On what date did the storming of the Bastille take place?

Answers to Sample Quiz I

Students' answers should approximate the following.

1. The problems leading to the French Revolution (possible answers):
 - a) The government was too centralized under the king.
 - b) The king's government had broken the political power of the nobles without removing their privileges.
 - c) Though they had hardly any function in society, nobles still demanded dues and service from the peasants and restricted their liberty to hunt and fish.
 - d) Local and royal taxes, tithes, as well as service burdens fell almost entirely on the peasants.
 - e) Royal services, such as the *corvée*, made peasants neglect their own farms and practice poor cultivation.
 - f) Nobles paid few taxes, and the Church only what it decided to contribute.
 - g) The cities, especially Paris, swelled with poor, who were full of bitterness against the aristocracy and the government.
 - h) The government in France was spending more money than it was taking in in taxes and faced bankruptcy.
2. The bourgeoisie were the middle class—merchants, bankers, shopkeepers, and professional men, such as lawyers and doctors. Some were immensely rich, while others had more moderate wealth while still others had very modest incomes.
3. Reasons why the French bourgeoisie were ready for revolution (possible answers):
 - a) They wanted a greater share in the government of the kingdom.
 - b) They admired the governments of Great Britain and the United States and wanted the French government to emulate them.
 - c) The bourgeoisie were greatly affected by Liberalism.
4. The *clergy* belonged to the First Estate. The *nobility* belonged to the Second Estate. The *commoners* belonged to Third Estate.
5. King Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General to solve the problem of bankruptcy that France had fallen into.
6. By calling itself the National Assembly, the Third Estate was claiming to be the sovereign power in France—the representative of the French people.
7. The storming of the Bastille took place on *July 14, 1789*.

Sample Quiz II (pages 101–118)

Please answer the following in complete sentences.

1. Who is the sovereign power in France, according to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*?
2. What did the *Declaration* say about the rights of citizens?
3. Why did the French National Assembly confiscate the property of the Church in France?
4. Why did Pope Pius VI condemn the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*?
5. Could the king stop laws passed by the Legislative Assembly under the Constitution of 1791? Please explain.
6. Please give one reason King Louis XVI wanted to overthrow the French revolutionary government.
7. Who *supported* the Constitution of 1791? (Multiple answers possible.)
 - a) Girondins
 - b) Feuillants
 - c) *émigrés*
 - d) Jacobins
 - e) Jean-Paul Marat
 - f) Cordeliers
 - g) Danton
 - h) Robespierre
 - i) Louis XVI
8. Who *opposed* the Constitution of 1791? (Use the list in question 7. Multiple answers possible.)

Answers to Sample Quiz II

Students' answers should approximate the following

1. The *people of France* is the sovereign power in France, according to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*.
2. The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* said all citizens have equal rights
3. The French National Assembly confiscated the property of the Church in France to save the government from bankruptcy
4. Pope Pius VI condemned the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* because it separated the Church in France from the authority of the pope. It brought the French Church into schism.
5. The king could stop or veto laws passed by the Legislative Assembly, but only for a limited number of times. He had a suspensive veto, not an absolute veto.
6. King Louis XVI wanted to overthrow the French revolutionary government because (possible answers):
 - a) He thought the French revolutionary government had unjustly seized power from him.
 - b) He objected to the anticlerical legislation of the both the National Assembly and the Legislative Assembly.
7. The Feuillants (b) *supported* the Constitution of 1791.
8. The Girondins (a), the *émigrés* (c), the Jacobins (d), Marat (e), the Cordeliers (f), Danton (g), Robespierre (h), and Louis XVI (i) all *opposed* the Constitution of 1791

Essays (200–500 words each)

Instructions to be given to the students: Write in complete sentences. Underline your thesis. Give three supports or examples that explain why you think what you do and that support your thesis.

1. Imagine yourself to be a clergyman (bishop or priest) or a nobleman living before the revolution. Tell why you are either content or discontent with the way things are going for you and your society.
2. Do you think a revolution could help or hinder a society. Use the French Revolution as an example.

Chapter Test

Please answer the following in complete sentences.

I. Short Essay—Answer two of the following:

1. Give four problems that afflicted France before 1789 and that led to the outbreak of the French Revolution.
2. Describe the events that led to the storming of the Bastille. (Consider the following questions in your essay: Why did Louis XVI call for a meeting of the Estates-General? What did the Third Estate demand from the king and the other Estates? What did the Third Estate claim for itself? What was the king's response?)
3. What were the main ideas of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*? On whose philosophy of government and society was it based?
4. What was the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*? What did it do? How did bishops and priests respond to it? What effects did it have on the relationship of Catholics to the revolution? What effect did it have on King Louis XVI?

II. Short Answer:

1. Give two reasons the bourgeoisie favored the French Revolution.
2. Why did the French National Assembly decide to confiscate Church property?
3. Was the Constitution of 1791 democratic? Please explain.
4. Why did extremist revolutionaries such as the Cordeliers and the Jacobins decide to overthrow King Louis XVI in August 1792?
5. Name the battle that saved the French Revolution. On what date was it fought?
6. What do we call the power a head of state has only to delay a bill becoming a law, not stop it altogether?
7. What was the name for the political and social system of Europe before the French Revolution?
8. What was the name given to a clergyman who refused to take an oath to support the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy*?

Answer Key to Chapter Test

Students' answers should approximate the following:

I.

1. The following are the problems that afflicted France before 1789 (possible answers):
 - a) The government was too centralized under the king.
 - b) The king's government had broken the political power of the nobles without removing their privileges.
 - c) Though they had hardly any function in society, nobles still demanded dues and service from the peasants and restricted their liberty to hunt and fish.
 - d) Local and royal taxes, tithes, as well as service burdens fell almost entirely on the peasants.
 - e) Royal services, such as the *corvée*, made peasants neglect their own farms and practice poor cultivation.
 - f) Nobles paid few taxes and the Church, only what it decided to contribute.
 - g) The cities, especially Paris, swelled with poor who were full of bitterness against the aristocracy and the government.
 - h) The government in France was spending more money than it was taking in in taxes and faced bankruptcy.
2. Among the problems afflicting France before 1789 was the fact that the French government was facing bankruptcy. To solve this problem, Louis XVI called a meeting of the Estates-General. When the Estates-General met, the Third Estate (commons), under the influence of Liberal ideas, insisted that the First Estate (the clergy) and the Second Estate (nobility) form one assembly with it. When the king

refused to allow this, the Third Estate established itself as the National Assembly—the sole representative of the French people. When, at last, the king saw the National Assembly was gaining influence and power, he recognized it on June 27, 1789. Yet, despite his recognition of the new government, King Louis XVI was determined to end the revolution. He called in his German mercenary regiments to Paris and he dismissed a popular minister. These acts inspired an uprising among the poor of Paris. On July 14, 1789, about 1,000 armed men and women assaulted and captured a fortress, the Bastille. The next day, the king again gave in to revolutionary demands.

3. The main ideas of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* are as follows:
 - a) The law expresses the general will of the people; the people are sovereign and all political power comes from them.
 - b) All citizens are equal.
 - c) The purpose of government is to preserve the natural rights of man, which are life, liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression.
 - d) Citizens have the right to speak their ideas and opinions and the right to religious freedom.

The Declaration drew its basic ideas from the philosophy of Rousseau.

4. The *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* removed (except in matters of doctrine) the French Church entirely out from under the authority of the pope. It brought the French Church into schism. In response to the *Civil Constitution*, most bishops and priests refused to take an oath to obey it. Thus, it caused divisions in the

French Church. The *Civil Constitution* had the effect of turning many of the French, who had formerly supported the revolution, against it. It was one of the reasons King Louis XVI turned against the revolution, for he was a devout Catholic and resented the fact that he had been forced to sign the bill into law.

II.

1. The reasons the bourgeoisie favored the French Revolution (possible answers):
 - a) The French bourgeoisie wanted governmental reforms.
 - b) They wanted a greater share in the government of the kingdom.
 - c) They were inspired by Liberal thinkers such as John Locke, Voltaire, and Rousseau.
2. The French National Assembly decide to confiscate Church property because it needed money to solve the bankruptcy crisis. The Assembly thought Church property could supply it with the wealth it needed to do so.
3. The Constitution of 1791 was not democratic because it only allowed those who paid taxes and owned property to vote. Even these had only an indirect vote, for they did not vote for the candidates themselves but for electors who, in turn, voted for candidates.
4. Extremist revolutionaries such as the Cordeliers and the Jacobins decided to overthrow King Louis XVI in August 1792 because they thought he was conspiring with France's enemies to overthrow the revolutionary government.
5. The *Battle of Valmy* saved the French Revolution. It was fought on September 20, 1792.
6. A *suspensive veto* is the power a head of state has only to delay a bill becoming a law, not stop it altogether.
7. The *ancient regime* was the name for the political and social system of Europe before the French Revolution.
8. A clergyman who refused to take an oath to support the *Civil Constitution of the Clergy* was called a *nonjuror*.