France was torn by eight religious wars between Catholics and Protestants from 1562 to 1598. In 1589, a Protestant prince, Henry of Navarre, became King Henry IV. In 1593, he changed religions. He became a Catholic to please the majority of his people. In 1598, he issued an order called the Edict of Nantes. It gave Huguenots—French Protestants—the right to live in peace and have their own churches in some cities. Henry rebuilt the French economy and brought peace to the land. He was followed by his son, Louis XIII, a weak king. However, Louis had a very capable chief minister, Cardinal Richelieu. Richelieu ruled the land for Louis and increased the power of the crown. The cardinal ordered the Huguenots not to build walls around their cities. He also said nobles had to destroy their castles. As a result, Protestants and nobles could not hide within walls to defy the king’s power. Richelieu used people from the middle class—not nobles—to work in his government. That also reduced the power of the nobles. French thinkers had reacted to the religious wars with horror. Many developed a new philosophy called skepticism. Religions could not be proved and might all be wrong. Since nothing could be known for certain, they argued, doubting old ideas (like religion) was the first step to learning the truth.

1. What two things did Cardinal Richelieu do to reduce the power of the Nobles in France?

In 1643, Louis XIV became king at the age of about five. Cardinal Mazarin, who succeeded Richelieu as minister, ruled for Louis until he was 22. Louis became a powerful ruler, who had total control of France. He was determined to never let nobles challenge him. He kept the nobles out of his government. He gave more power to government officials called intendants and made sure that they answered only to him. He also worked hard to increase the wealth of France. His chief minister of finance, Jean Baptiste Colbert, tried to build French industry. Colbert wanted to persuade French people to buy French made goods and not those from other countries. He urged people to settle in the new French colony of Canada in North America. The fur trade there brought wealth to France.

2. Why do you think Jean Baptiste Colbert wanted French people to buy French made goods?
THE SUN KING’S GRAND STYLE; LOUIS FIGHTS DISASTROUS WARS  (Pages 165–168)

Louis enjoyed a life of luxury at his court. He built a huge and beautiful palace at Versailles near Paris. He also made sure that nobles had to depend on his favor to advance in society. Louis made France the most powerful nation in Europe. France had a larger population and a bigger army than any other country. However, Louis made some mistakes that later proved costly. After winning some wars against neighboring countries, he became bolder and tried to seize more land. Other nations allied to stop France in the late 1680s. The high cost of these wars combined with poor harvests to produce widespread discontent among the people in France.

The final war fought in Louis’s time was fought over succession to the throne of Spain and lasted from 1700 to 1713. In this War of the Spanish Succession, France and Spain attempted to set up united thrones. The rest of Europe felt threatened and joined in war against them. Both France and Spain were forced to give up some of their American and European colonies to England. England was the new rising power.

3. How did Louis XIV bring disaster to France?

Terms and Names  Identify or define the following:

Edict of Nantes-

Cardinal Richelieu-

Skepticism-

Louis XIV-

Intendant-

Jean Baptiste Colbert-

War of the Spanish Succession-