Charles dismissed Parliament and did not call it back into session until 1640. By then, he had angered his subjects in Scotland and needed money to put down their revolt. Under the guidance of William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Anglican Church, Charles had tried to impose the *Book of Common Prayer* and the hierarchy of bishops and archbishops on Presbyterian Scotland. This led to war with Scotland. However, Laud had also attempted to clamp down on religious dissenters in England, notably Puritans. For example, he had the Puritan pamphleteer William Prynne thrown in jail and even had Prynne’s ears chopped off. Many of the Puritans who came to America in the 1620s and ’30s were fleeing from Laud and his regulations.

When Charles called Parliament into session, his opponents in Parliament seized the opportunity to stage their own revolt against him. The king and the Long Parliament, as it came to be known (it met irregularly from 1640 to 1653), goaded each other in a series of escalating actions. Parliament had several of Charles’s advisors, including Archbishop Laud, arrested, tried, and executed. Charles had little choice but to make peace with Scotland. Parliament forced Charles to agree that Parliament could not be dismissed without its consent, that only Parliament could approve new taxes, and that Parliament must be called into session every three years.

By 1641, the Puritans had gained enough power to force passage of a bill requiring Parliament’s approval of the king’s advisors. In retaliation, Charles marched into the House of Commons at the head of a group of soldiers to arrest the leaders of the opposition. They escaped, but the political rivalry had turned into civil war.

**Civil War: Cavaliers and Roundheads**

The English Civil War lasted from 1642 to 1649. The followers of the king were known as Cavaliers, meaning gallant gentlemen. His opponents were known as Roundheads. The name came from the men’s habit of cropping their hair close to their heads, rather than wearing their hair in the long, flowing style of the aristocrats who supported the king.

For the first two years of the war, the king and his forces were successful. However, in 1645, the Roundheads chose Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan, as their general. Cromwell turned the forces supporting the dissidents in Parliament into the New Model Army, a highly disciplined and efficient military organization that believed that God supported it and that it fought with divine help. By 1646, Charles had surrendered, but the civil war was not over.

Cromwell’s supporters seized control of Parliament by ousting the majority of members who wanted a monarchy limited by constitutional guarantees for the rights of the people and Parliament. Cromwell installed the Rump Parliament, 100 members who agreed with his idea of eliminating the monarchy in favor of a republic. Another round of fighting broke out. Though Cromwell’s supporters were in the minority, they controlled the army and within a few months had defeated the supporters of the king.

**Execution of Charles I**

Cromwell had Charles tried for treason. The verdict was guilty, and on January 30, 1649, a sentence of immediate execution was handed down to that “tyrant, traitor, murderer, and public enemy.” He was taken to his own Palace of
Whitehall, where a scaffold had been erected outside a second-floor window. Crowds braved the bitter January weather to watch the decapitation from nearby rooftops, marveling at the doomed king's courage as he knelt by the executioner's block. It is said that Charles called himself “a martyr of the people,” forgave his enemies, and gave the signal himself for the executioner to strike. It is also said that he wore two shirts on the day of his execution in order to be sure he didn't shiver and appear to be nervous. When his head was chopped off, many in the crowd groaned in disbelief.

The execution of the king was a shock to the English and to others as well. No European monarch had ever been tried and executed by his or her own people. The precedent was now established that a ruler who attempted to exercise absolute power without the consent of the governed could be punished.

Oliver Cromwell and the Puritan Regime

With the Rump Parliament in power, the monarchy, the Church of England, and the House of Lords were abolished and a Commonwealth was established based on Cromwell's idea for a republic. Opposition to Cromwell continued, however. In 1653, he dismissed the Rump Parliament, called a new Parliament (the Barebones Parliament), and assumed the title of Lord Protector. By 1655, he had dissolved Parliament again and placed England under military rule with himself as dictator.

Charles I's son, also named Charles, and his supporters invaded England from bases in Scotland and Ireland but with little effect. In retaliation, Cromwell led his own invasion of Ireland in 1649 and 1650. By the time the fighting was over, as many as a third of the Irish people had been killed and as much as two-thirds of Irish lands were confiscated from their Roman Catholic owners and given to Cromwell's English Protestant, often Puritan, supporters. While Cromwell supported a policy of religious toleration for Jews and all Protestants except Anglicans, he persecuted Roman Catholics.

The Commonwealth was based on Puritan ideals. Like Calvin in Geneva, Cromwell sought to establish a moral, godly community of believers. Sunday was a day of prayerful observance, to be used only for religious services. Because reading the Bible was important to one's duty of examining one's conscience continually, Cromwell supported public education for girls as well as boys. Theaters and taverns were closed as distractions and obstacles to godliness. Dancing, gambling, maypole dancing, and other traditional festive activities were also prohibited.

The Restoration, 1660

Cromwell died in 1658 and it was soon apparent that without him, the harsh regulations of the Commonwealth could not hold the English public's loyalty. In 1660, a new Parliament, with the support of the army, asked Charles I's son to return and be crowned Charles II (1660–1685). This marks the beginning of a period in English history known as the Restoration. During the Restoration, England expanded its power and wealth through colonization and the development of international trade.

Under the religious settlement that ended the Puritan regime, the Church of England was reinstated and a series of laws passed between 1661 and 1665 limiting the activities of Puritans and Roman Catholics. They were allowed to practice