

Notre Dame

After a fire that raged for at least 12 hours, starting on April 15th, Notre Dame Cathedral stood damaged but defiant Wednesday and the cross on the church's altar, though buried in debris, was almost shining. 24-hours later, almost \$1 billion had been raised to rebuild the iconic monument, and French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe announced an international competition for architects to rebuild the spire. And, in case you're wondering why the Catholic Church, probably the wealthiest private institution in the world, isn't paying for the reconstruction, it's because the French government actually owns the cathedral.

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame is among the most famous landmarks in Paris, drawing about 13 million visitors a year. The cathedral was built on a small island called the Île de la Cité, in the middle of the Seine River. Construction began in 1163, during the reign of King Louis VII, and was completed in 1345. It is considered a jewel of medieval Gothic architecture.

After construction had begun, flying buttresses were added to the design of the cathedral. The design is meant to hold the thin, tall, Gothic-style walls up and prevent cracks in them. The beautiful flying buttresses are meant to provide support to the structure but also add to the cathedral's Gothic style.

The cathedral that was seen in modern times is actually not the original structure. It has been repaired and renovated a number of times in the last 800+years. For example, It was damaged and neglected in the 1790s, during the French Revolution. Victor Hugo's 1831 novel, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, published in English as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, informed readers about the building's decrepit condition.

Henry VI of England was made king of France inside Notre-Dame in 1431. Napoleon Bonaparte, who also sought to save the storied cathedral, was crowned emperor there in 1804. In 1909, Joan of Arc, who had helped France battle the English and was burned at the stake centuries earlier, was beatified in the cathedral by Pope Pius X. The cathedral was also home to the crown of thorns and the tunic of Saint Louis, both of which apparently made it safely out of the fire and to Paris City Hall. The crown of thorns is believed to be the same that Jesus Christ wore during the crucifixion.

French Prime Minister Edouard Philippe has pledged to rebuild the cathedral within five years, and reconstruction work is already underway on one of the most famous buildings in the world.

