

The second vial— Two hundred years on

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At the end of a year of celebrations of Britain's naval victory at Trafalgar, we consider the significance of this victory for the fulfilment of Bible prophecy, past, present and future.

MOST VISITORS to London go to Trafalgar Square and look upwards to see the statue of Lord Nelson perched on the top of the column bearing his name. This national hero of Great Britain has been feted in numerous ways this past year, as 21 October 2005 was the two hundredth anniversary of the famous battle of Trafalgar. In this battle, fought off the coast of Spain, the British fleet under Lord Nelson defeated the combined fleets of Spain and France, and established the supremacy of the Royal Navy on the oceans of the world for over a hundred years. It was a battle that ended the life of Nelson, one of the greatest sailors ever born in England, resulting in an extraordinary outpouring of national grief at the time.

Celebrations

The anniversary of this great victory has been celebrated in various ways during the past year. On 28 June the Queen reviewed the fleet in the Solent off Portsmouth, along with ships from thirty-five other nations, a total of 167 ships in all. It was followed by a re-enactment of the naval battle, and a firework display using the same amount of gunpowder as was used during the Battle of Trafalgar itself. On 16 September there was a flotilla of forty-one rowing boats reproducing the funeral procession that carried Nelson's body from Greenwich Palace to Whitehall along the River Thames.

In the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich, a *Nelson and Napoleon* exhibition was held, with many original documents, artefacts and paintings on display. The book accompanying this exhibition (see [Books consulted](#)) is highly



Advert for the *Nelson and Napoleon* Exhibition at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

recommended, as it has photographs of most of the items in the exhibition and an excellent text. In many towns and villages, Trafalgar Day (21 October) was celebrated with exhibitions, garden parties, dances and concerts. Queen Elizabeth dined on board *HMS Victory* at its moorings at Portsmouth. Wreaths were laid on Nelson's tomb in St Paul's Cathedral. Events were organised at Cape Trafalgar and Cadiz with the Royal Navy and the Spanish Navy. And there has been an outpouring of books about the achievements of Lord Nelson. Two of these are recommended to the reader interested in the details of the Battle of Trafalgar (see [Books consulted](#)).

The second vial

It was, however, the battle that Nelson waged with Napoleon at the mouth of the River Nile in 1798 that is included in prophecy. The second vial of God's anger against the Catholic nations of Europe, following the tumultuous times of the French Revolution, was poured upon the sea according to Revelation 16:3. The Mediterranean is represented as 'the sea' in both Daniel and Revelation (see, for example,

The second vial

And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea

(Rev. 16:3)



PICTURE: DAVID WILLEY

Statue of Nelson in the Cathedral Close at Norwich facing the school he attended for two years.

Daniel 7:2 and Revelation 13:1), since many of the prophesied events occurred in the locality of this sea. The result of the pouring out of the second vial was that the sea "became as the blood of a dead man: and every living soul died in the sea". This indicates stagnation, the ceasing of shipping activity.

At the end of the eighteenth century, France dominated Europe and had alliances with Spain, Italy and the Netherlands. Napoleon, at this time France's military leader but not yet emperor, was a brilliant soldier who always had in mind to invade and conquer Britain, but he decided first to move eastwards, to Egypt. An expedition was launched to conquer Egypt, secure the exclusive use of the Red Sea and so prepare the way for a possible later advance to India, then under British control. This expedition had thirteen 'ships of the line', a number of frigates, an army of 31,000 men and a supply convoy of some 280 vessels.

In June 1798 Napoleon arrived in Egypt, took Alexandria, defeated the Egyptians in the Battle of the Pyramids and took Cairo, thus effectively securing the country. The British knew that the expedition was being launched but did not know where it was heading. The British fleet, under the command of Rear Admiral Nelson, had a task force of twelve 'ships of the line' and just three frigates, but no supply organisation. Nelson spent an anxious two months searching for the French fleet in the Mediterranean. On 1 August 1798 he finally sighted it in Aboukir Bay, at the mouth of the Nile.

He decided to attack immediately, as the French fleet was in a vulnerable and unprepared state. Battle was joined at 5.30 in the evening. In less than three hours five French ships had surrendered, and by dawn the next day the British victory was total. The French had only two of their ships still in their possession, 1,700 French officers and sailors were dead, and there were 1,500 wounded and 3,300 taken prisoner. The next afternoon, 2 August, a service of thanksgiving was held on the quarterdeck of Nelson's ship *Vanguard* and on other ships of the fleet to "thank God for having blessed His Majesty's Arms with victory".

In Britain, when the news of the victory was received some weeks later, the battle at the Nile was seen "to have defended British liberties, religion and the monarchy against French atheism and regicidal republicanism". Napoleon soon abandoned his army in Egypt and sailed for France, an action which many saw at the time as desertion. As the second vial predicted, those countries bordering the Mediterranean had lost control of it, and could not use it freely. Napoleon's eastward ambitions were thwarted and Britain was in control of the Mediterranean.

The lead up to the Battle of Trafalgar

A short-lived peace followed, and hostilities resumed in 1803. For two years Nelson was in the Mediterranean keeping an unbroken watch on Toulon in southern France, where the French fleet was based. A major concern was the threat of an invasion across the English Channel. Napoleon had a large and successful army, but to get it across the water it needed cover by a fleet from Brest in Brittany, since France had no naval bases in the English Channel or the North Sea. A blockade of Brest was reinstated by the British navy. The British fleet was therefore at sea for very long periods, and its crews developed efficiency

and teamwork. The enemy, however, was kept in port, unable to prepare and train for conflict.

In Britain, the government unleashed a wave of propaganda to counteract Napoleon's attempts to influence public opinion in Europe, and also created local volunteer forces to oppose a possible invasion. By 1804 about twenty-five per cent of adult males were enrolled in these forces. Martello towers were built on the coast to fire at invading ships.

In 1805 Napoleon began to carry out his elaborate plan to invade Britain. As part of his plan, Rear Admiral Villeneuve, the commander-in-chief of the French Mediterranean fleet, left Toulon on 18 January 1805, but immediately ran into a westerly gale, which badly damaged his ships and compelled him to return to port after only three days. It was not until 30 March that Villeneuve set out for the West Indies, to draw the British fleet away from the English Channel. He eluded Lord Nelson and escaped out of the Mediterranean, calling at Cadiz to collect Spanish ships before beginning the long Atlantic crossing.

In the meantime, Rear Admiral Missiessy had left Rochefort, and arrived in the West Indies in mid February, waiting nearly three months before sailing for home. The Brest fleet had been unable to leave due to the blockading of the port by Lord Cornwallis' ships. Villeneuve arrived in the West Indies in mid-May. Nelson chased him there, but once again Villeneuve eluded him and set off for home when he learned his enemy was in the area. Nelson sent a fast brig, the *Curieux*, ahead to warn the Admiralty of the combined French and Spanish fleet's movements. On their return journey the combined fleet was engaged by Lord Calder off Cape Finisterre (Brittany), and two Spanish ships were captured.

Villeneuve was unnerved by the way his every move had been countered by the British, so he took the combined fleet into Cadiz for refuge. By now Napoleon was facing war with Austria, and learning of the retreat of his navy he flew into a rage, crying, "What a navy! What an admiral!", and abandoned his plans for the invasion of Britain.

The immediate threat of invasion was over, but there were several reasons why it was important for the British to destroy the combined French and Spanish fleet. While the fleet was intact an invasion of Britain was always possible. Also, Napoleon had ambitions to increase his empire eastwards and move into India, as the Battle of the Nile showed. The lucrative trade with North and South America was also a great prize. Sugar, coffee, cocoa, ginger, spices, precious metals and slaves were some of the valuable commodities on offer. Whoever controlled the Atlantic Ocean controlled this trade.

France was rapidly increasing its trade, especially with the West Indies, and the British Government wished to stop this. Following the French Revolution, the French Navy was weakened, having lost many of its officers, who were aristocrats, and the British Government under William Pitt sensed that this would be the right moment to destroy the French and Spanish navies. So Nelson, who had been at sea non-stop for two years, was called from Merton, then a village to the southwest of London, where he was resting with Emma Hamilton, his mistress, and Horatia, his only and illegitimate daughter.

The battle itself

On 13 September 1805 Lord Nelson left Merton Place for Portsmouth and sailed in the *Victory*, accompanied by *Ajax* and *Thunderer*. They joined other British ships of war off the coasts of France and Portugal, making a fleet of twenty-seven ships. The combined Spanish and French fleet

HMS *Victory* at Portsmouth.





Flotilla of boats reproducing Nelson's funeral procession along the River Thames.

numbered thirty-three, but some of their crews lacked training and their morale was low. On 19 October the combined fleet emerged from Cadiz, heading south. Nelson was determined that the enemy would not elude him for a third time and by means of frigates and fast battleships kept in touch with the allied fleet's movements.

The two fleets sighted each other on 21 October. The story of the battle that took place off Trafalgar Bay, Spain, is told in detail in the books cited at the end of the article. Nelson led one group of ships to fight the vanguard of the enemy while Admiral Collingwood led the other group against the rearguard. The allied ships fought bravely but the morale and tactics of the British overwhelmed them.

At about 1.15 p.m. a French musket ball struck Lord Nelson while he was on the quarterdeck of the *Victory*, and he was carried down to the cockpit. The ball hit him on his left shoulder, went through his chest and lodged in his backbone. At 4.30 he died, his last words being, reputedly, "Thank God I have done my duty". Before he died he was made aware that half of the allied ships had surrendered.

The victory was overwhelming, even though a storm afterwards meant that some of the captured ships sank and one or two escaped. Nelson's body was preserved in a barrel of brandy, and he was given a state funeral, his coffin being rowed up the River Thames from Greenwich Palace to Whitehall Steps and then carried in a procession to St Paul's Cathedral, where he was interred.

The significance of the battle

The victory at Trafalgar meant that Britain rather than France dominated the trade routes to America, and English, not French, was the language spoken in North America. Also, Roman Catholicism did not become the predominant religion of the USA. The word of prophecy had declared that it would be the role of the merchants of Tarshish and their young lions to challenge the latter-day confederacy from Europe and Russia. Also, the ships of Tarshish will

be the first to convey Jews to Israel, and it will be the privilege of the kings of Tarshish to bring their gifts to the Lord Jesus when he is enthroned in Jerusalem in the Kingdom.

From our viewpoint we see two great leaders, Nelson and Napoleon, raised up by God at about the same time in history to carry out His purpose. They were both in their different ways men for their time. Napoleon was a brilliant soldier who punished both France and Austria in the pouring out of the bowls of God's wrath. Nelson was a great naval captain who inspired loyalty and devotion from his men and who curbed the power of Napoleon. But long after these men and their exploits are forgotten, the greatest man of all, our Lord Jesus Christ, will be praised and adored by all mankind day by day in the glorious Kingdom for which we long and pray.

Books consulted

Nelson and Napoleon, edited by Margaret Lincoln, National Maritime Museum, 2005, £30.

Trafalgar: The Men, the Battle, the Storm, T. Clayton and P. Craig, Hodder and Stoughton, 2004, £20 (paperback also available).

Trafalgar: the Nelson Touch", D. Howarth, 1997, Phoenix, £7.99.

The Apocalypse and History, W. H. Boulton and W. H. Barker, The Christadelphian.