Lesson 1 The Development of Feudalism

BEFORE YOU READ
In this lesson, you will learn how Christianity spread and feudalism developed in Europe.

AS YOU READ
Use this chart to take notes on what role each group played in the feudal structure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lords</th>
<th>Vassals</th>
<th>Serfs</th>
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Setting of Medieval Europe
(pages 291–293)

What changes occurred in Europe?
The Western Roman Empire fell in the late fifth century. This led to a period in Europe known as the Middle Ages (500–1450). This time is also known as the medieval period. During the Middle Ages, Europe became home to many small kingdoms.

Europe has a number of distinct geographic features. The European continent occupies the western part of the Eurasian land mass. This is the continuous stretch of land that includes Europe and Asia.

Europe borders the Atlantic Ocean on the west, the Arctic Ocean on the north, and the Mediterranean Sea on the south. In the east, the Ural Mountains separate Europe from Asia. Plains and farmland cover much of northern and western Europe. Europe has many rivers and lakes. Mild weather and steady rainfall encouraged farming throughout Europe.

Europe’s geography played a key role in shaping the pattern of life during the Middle Ages. The favorable climate and many acres of good farmland enabled Europe’s small kingdoms and estates to thrive.

The political and social landscape of Europe changed greatly after the fall of Rome. Numerous Germanic groups controlled Europe. Unlike the Romans, Germanic people lived in small communities. They kept order through unwritten rules. They did not develop organized governments or trade systems.

Most schools disappeared during the Middle Ages. Eventually, few people could read or write Latin. Trade throughout Europe also declined. With less trade and commercial activity, most cities disappeared. Many people moved to the country. There, they made their living by farming.
Chapter 9, Lesson 1

READING STUDY GUIDE CONTINUED

1. Why did many cities disappear after the fall of Rome?

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Christianity Grows and Spreads (pages 293–295)

How did Christianity grow?

One institution that survived the fall of Rome was the Christian Church. Many German rulers and their subjects converted to Christianity. A powerful Germanic group called the Franks played a key role in strengthening Christianity in Europe. In the late 400s, a Frankish leader named Clovis defeated the last great Roman army in Gaul. By 507, his kingdom covered much of modern France. Around this time, Clovis converted to Christianity. In time, most of his subjects became Christians.

More than two centuries later, another powerful ruler led the Franks. His name was Charlemagne. He conquered new lands to the north and south. By 800, the Franks ruled much of western Europe. Charlemagne created a highly organized and well-run empire. He spread Christianity to the lands he conquered.

While strong rulers spread Christianity, so too did the work done in monasteries. Monasteries were places where religious followers practiced a life of prayer and worship. During the Middle Ages, monasteries arose across Europe. The religious followers who lived and worked in monasteries were known as monks. These people studied Christian works and wrote copies of the Bible. By doing so, they preserved and promoted Christian ideas and beliefs.

2. Which European leaders helped to spread Christianity?

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Feudalism: A New Social Order (pages 295–297)

What was feudalism?

Charlemagne died in 814. By the mid-800s, the Frankish kingdom became divided into three parts. This split caused the kingdom to grow weak. The decline of Frankish rule led to disorder across Europe.

Scandinavian pirates, called Vikings, and Muslims attacked coastal regions. A group known as the Magyars attacked towns throughout central Europe. Beginning in the mid-800s, Europe became a place of constant conflict and warfare.

With so much instability and violence, kings and nobles looked for a way to hold onto their power. To accomplish this, they developed a system known as feudalism. Feudalism was a political system based on an agreement between two groups of nobles—lords and vassals. A lord was a powerful noble who owned land. Lords gave pieces of their land to weaker nobles known as vassals. In return for the land, the vassal promised to protect the lord and his land. Many vassals were warriors known as knights.

Feudalism created a well-defined social structure throughout Europe. At the top of feudal society ruled the king. Next came wealthy landowners and high-ranking church members. Serving below them were knights. At the bottom of society were peasants. Most peasants were serfs. Serfs lived and worked on land that belonged to a lord or vassal. In return, the nobles granted them shelter and protection.

3. What agreement served as the basis of feudalism?

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