

The Middle Ages

Lesson 2



MAIN IDEAS

1. Feudalism governed how knights and nobles dealt with each other.
2. Feudalism spread through much of Europe.
3. The manor system dominated Europe's economy.
4. Towns and trade grew and helped end the feudal system.

Key Terms and People

knights warriors who fought on horseback

vassal a knight who promised to support a lord in exchange for land

feudalism the system that governs the relationship between lords and vassals

William the Conqueror French noble who conquered England and spread feudalism

manor large estate owned by a knight or lord

serfs workers who were tied to the land on which they lived

Eleanor of Aquitaine powerful French noblewoman who became queen of France and England

Lesson Summary

FEUDALISM GOVERNS KNIGHTS AND NOBLES

When the Vikings, Magyars, and Muslims began their raids in the 800s, the Frankish kings were unable to defend their empire. Nobles had to defend their own lands. Many nobles began to rule their lands as independent territories. These nobles needed soldiers. They gave **knights**, warriors who fought on horseback, land in exchange for military service. A noble who gave land to a knight was called a lord, while the knight was called a **vassal**. The system that governed the promises between lords and vassals is called **feudalism**.

Lords and vassals had responsibilities to each other. A lord had to send help if an enemy attacked a vassal. A lord had to be fair or vassals could break all ties with him. Vassals had to fight at a lord's command. They also had to house and feed a lord if he visited and sometimes pay him money.

Why did many nobles become rulers of their own lands?

List two responsibilities of a vassal toward a lord.

Lesson 2, *continued*

FEUDALISM SPREADS

Frankish knights introduced feudalism into northern Italy, Spain, and Germany. From Germany, knights carried feudalism into eastern Europe. Feudalism reached Britain when **William the Conqueror** invaded and made himself king of England.

Who brought feudalism to Britain?

THE MANOR SYSTEM

An estate owned by a knight or lord was called a **manor**. As fighters, knights had no time to work in the fields. Most peasants, or small farmers, owned no land but needed to grow food to live. Knights let them live and farm land on their estates. In return, the peasants gave them food or other payment. **Serfs**, workers who were tied to the land on which they lived, were not allowed to leave without their lord's permission. Skilled workers also lived and worked on the manor. They traded goods and services to the peasants in exchange for food.

What did knights and peasants provide each other under feudalism?

Women in the Middle Ages had fewer rights than men, but they still played important roles in society. Some women, like the French woman **Eleanor of Aquitaine**, even became politically powerful.

TOWNS AND TRADE GROW

Most people lived on manors or small farms during the Middle Ages. However, as Europe's population grew, more people began living in towns and cities. The invention of a horse collar and a heavier plow made more food available. Increased trade eventually led to the decline of feudalism because people could make a living by making or selling particular types of goods.

What changes helped lead to a decline in feudalism?

Lesson 2, *continued*

CHALLENGE ACTIVITY

Critical Thinking: Summarize During the Middle Ages, the ability for people to improve their lives depended upon where they started out in life. Research the options for advancement for one of the following people: the lord of a manor, lady of a manor, a vassal, or a peasant. Then write a short summary describing any options this person had.

DIRECTIONS On the line provided before each statement, write **T** if a statement is true and **F** if a statement is false. If the statement is false, write the correct term on the line after each sentence that makes the sentence a true statement.

- _____ 1. William the Conqueror declared himself king of England after defeating the English king near the town of Hastings.

- _____ 2. Eleanor of Aquitaine was a French woman who had great political power.

- _____ 3. A knight who promised to support a lord in exchange for money was called a serf.

- _____ 4. Vassals were tied to the land on which they lived and could not leave their land without permission from the lord.

- _____ 5. The best soldiers were manors, or warriors who fought on horseback.

- _____ 6. The large estate owned by a knight or a lord was called a manor.

- _____ 7. Fiefs were parcels of land that nobles gave knights for their military service.
