Lesson 1

MAIN IDEAS

1 Geography Climate, topography, and other geographic features helped bring about the feudal way of life in Europe.

2 Belief Systems Despite the upheaval in Europe, Christianity survived and spread.

3 Government Feudalism provided a social and political structure during the Middle Ages.

TAKING NOTES

Reading Skill: Categorizing

Categorizing involves grouping similar things together. As you read about the beginning of the Middle Ages and feudalism in Lesson 1, use a chart like the one shown here to record details that help explain the role that each group played in the feudal structure.

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Skillbuilder Handbook, page R6

Clovis I One of the more powerful kingdoms in Europe was built by the Franks. Their early leader was Clovis I.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

7.6.1 Study the geography of Europe and the Eurasian land mass, including their location, topography, waterways, vegetation, and climate and their relationship to ways of life in Medieval Europe.

7.6.2 Describe the spread of Christianity north of the Alps and the roles played by the early church and by monasteries in its early church after the fall of the western half of the Roman Empire.

7.6.3 Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography (the role of the manor and the growth of towns), and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order.
The Development of Feudalism

Build on What You Know  What comes to mind when you think of the Middle Ages? Perhaps it is knights in armor and fierce sword battles. Or maybe you picture large stone castles, where kings and queens and other nobles lived. In this chapter, you will learn about these aspects of the Middle Ages. You will also learn about a new political, economic, and social system known as feudalism that developed during this period.

Setting of Medieval Europe

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  What changes occurred in Europe after the fall of Rome?

The collapse of Rome in the late fifth century ushered in a roughly 1,000-year period (500–1450) known as the Middle Ages. This time is also known as the medieval period, from the Latin words medium (middle) and aevum (age). During much of the Middle Ages, Europe contained many small kingdoms that often fought one another.

The European Continent  The continent of Europe occupies about one-fifth of what is known as the Eurasian land mass. As its name indicates, the Eurasian land mass, or Eurasia, is the continuous stretch of land that includes Europe and Asia.
**Topography and Waterways**  Major geographic features make up Europe’s general boundaries. Europe borders the Atlantic Ocean on the west and the Arctic Ocean to the north. The Mediterranean Sea serves as Europe’s southern boundary. In the east, Europe is separated from Asia by the Ural Mountains.

The topography, or landforms, of Europe is diverse. (See map on page 289.) Rugged mountain ranges, such as the Apennines and the Alps, run across southern Europe. Much of northern and western Europe is a series of plains and farmland.

Meanwhile, rivers wind their way through many regions of Europe. The longest river in Europe is the Volga. It begins near Moscow, Russia, and runs 2,293 miles southeast into the Caspian Sea. Many smaller rivers and streams flow throughout Europe. As a result, river travel has long played a key role in trade and communications throughout the continent.

**Climate and Vegetation**  The climate patterns of Europe vary across the continent. Northern Europe experiences cold winters, while southern Europe has mild winters and hot and often dry summers. Most of Europe receives plenty of rainfall. As a result, there is much forest and farmland.

Generally mild weather and dependable rainfall have enabled agriculture to thrive throughout Europe. In the warmer weather of the Mediterranean region, for example, farmers of Medieval Europe could grow citrus fruits. Meanwhile, crops such as wheat and barley thrived in the climate of western Europe.

The abundance of forests, farmland, and rivers played a key role in shaping ways of life in Medieval Europe. As you will learn, Europe would become home to many small kingdoms and small estates that thrived on their own. This was due in large part to the favorable climate and topography, which allowed people to take and produce much of what they needed from the land.
**Cultural Changes** The political and cultural landscape of Europe changed greatly after the fall of Rome. The Romans no longer ruled the region by unifying its many different groups under one government. Instead, numerous Germanic kingdoms dominated the lands that had once been ruled by a mighty empire.

The Germanic groups that occupied Europe after the fall of Rome brought great cultural changes to the continent. The Romans, as you recall, had a highly developed government. They believed that the state was more important than the individual. The Romans also emphasized learning.

The Germanic peoples, on the other hand, had little notion of a state. Unlike the Romans, Germanic people lived in small communities and maintained order through unwritten rules and traditions. As a result, they did not develop large governments or trade systems. In addition, they did not emphasize learning scholarly works.

**Learning and Trade Decline** The educated middle class all but disappeared during the Middle Ages. Most schools ceased to exist. Eventually, few people could read or write Latin. Europeans mostly forgot about the great achievements of the ancient Greeks and Romans in the arts and learning.

As trade throughout Europe disappeared, so did many cities. Most city dwellers made their living by trading goods. The lack of trade prompted many of them to move to the country, where they made their living by farming.

**Review** What role did geography play in shaping medieval society in Europe?

**Christianity Grows and Spreads**

**Essential Question** What factors helped Christianity to grow and spread?

One institution that survived the fall of Rome was the Christian Church. Many German rulers and their subjects converted to Christianity. These conversions helped to spread Christianity throughout Europe. As you recall from Chapter 2, a group of Germanic people called the Franks established one of the more powerful kingdoms in Europe during the Middle Ages. The Franks and their powerful leaders played a significant role in strengthening Christianity north of the Alps in the lands of northern and western Europe.
Charlemagne and the Franks  In 486, a Frankish leader named Clovis invaded Roman Gaul (now France). He defeated the last great Roman army in Gaul. Clovis then went on to defeat other weaker Germanic groups. By 507, his kingdom stretched west from the Rhine River to the Pyrenees Mountains. Around this time, Clovis converted to Christianity. In time, most of his subjects became Christians.

The Rule of Charlemagne  Clovis died in 511. Some two centuries later, in the early 700s, a powerful leader named Charles Martel became ruler of the Franks. Charles expanded the Frankish kingdom through military conquest. Charles Martel’s son, Pepin the Short, became the next king of the Franks. Pepin ruled until his death in 768. His son Charles, also known as Charlemagne (SHAHR•luh•MAYN), then took over the kingdom.

Charlemagne built a European empire greater than any known since ancient Rome. By 800, the powerful Frankish king ruled much of western Europe. Charlemagne created a highly organized and well-run empire. He established new laws to help keep order in the kingdom. In addition, he enlisted powerful landholders known as counts to govern the many different regions of the empire. Charlemagne often traveled throughout the kingdom to ensure that the counts ruled justly.

Under the leadership of Charlemagne, Christianity grew stronger across Europe. Charlemagne spread Christianity through his conquests. A deeply religious man, he also encouraged and sometimes forced his subjects to become Christians.

History Makers

Charlemagne  (747–814)

Charlemagne certainly looked and acted like the powerful ruler of a large kingdom. He was tall and strong and enjoyed physical activities, especially swimming. He normally instructed his nobles and friends to swim with him. In addition, he also thrived on little sleep. He was said to wake up four or five times a night—often waking those around him to finish a task or give him reports.

Charlemagne also showed an interest in scholarly matters, including astronomy. However, one thing may have kept him from learning more. Historians speculate that like many others during the Middle Ages, the mighty Frankish king may have been unable to read.
The Growth of Monasteries  While powerful rulers helped to spread Christianity, devoted worshipers did the same. During the Middle Ages, religious structures known as monasteries arose across Europe. Monasteries were places where religious followers called monks practiced a life of prayer and worship. In monasteries, monks studied Christian works and made copies of the Bible. By doing so, they preserved and promoted the ideas and beliefs of Christianity.

REVIEW  Who was Charlemagne, and how did he strengthen Christianity?

Feudalism: A New Social Order

ESSENTIAL QUESTION  What was feudalism and how did it work?

After Charlemagne’s death in 814, his son, Louis I, became emperor. When Louis died, his three sons fought each other for control of the kingdom. They all signed a treaty in 843 that divided the empire into three parts. This split caused the Frankish kingdom to grow weak and unstable. The decline of Frankish rule led to disorder across Europe.

Various groups of people took advantage of this disorder. Scandinavian pirates, called Vikings, terrorized coastal villages. Muslims raided coastal areas in Italy and southern France. 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.
**The Emergence of Feudalism** This unstable and violent period led to the creation of a political and social system known as *feudalism*. Feudalism emerged largely as a way for kings and nobles to hold onto their land and power amid so much warfare.

Feudalism was 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 lesser nobles called vassals. These plots of land were called fiefs. In return for the land, the vassal owed his lord service in his court and army. Many vassals were warriors known as knights. Thus, they fought on behalf of the lord. Other vassals hired knights to defend the lord and his property. Vassals also paid taxes to their lord in return for their fief.
The Feudal Structure  Feudal society was highly structured. The king ruled at the top of society. Next came wealthy landowners and high-ranking church members. Serving below them were the knights. At the bottom of society were the peasants. Most peasants were serfs. Serfs were people who lived and worked on the land belonging to a lord or a vassal. In return, the nobles granted them shelter and protection.

Feudalism created a new political structure in Europe. Europe became home to many small kingdoms and estates ruled by kings and powerful nobles. In the next lesson, you will learn more about everyday life in Europe during the feudal age.

**Review** What role did serfs play in feudalism?

**Lesson Summary**
- The Germanic invasions transformed Europe.
- Kings and monasteries helped to spread Christianity.
- Warfare and the constant threat of invasion led to the development of feudalism in Europe.

**Why It Matters Now . . .**
The strength and popularity of Christianity today is due in part to all of the efforts to promote the religion during the Middle Ages.

**Terms & Names**
1. Explain the importance of
   - Middle Ages
   - monastery
   - lord
   - Charlemagne
   - feudalism
   - serf

**Using Your Notes**
**Categorizing** Use your completed chart to answer the following question:
2. Which group held the least amount of power? (7.6.3)

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**Main Ideas**
3. How did geography help shape the way of life in Europe during the Middle Ages? (7.6.1)
4. What role did monasteries play in strengthening Christianity? (7.6.2)
5. What role did vassals play in the structure of feudalism? (7.6.3)

**Critical Thinking**
6. **Understanding Cause and Effect** How did warfare and the constant threat of invasion in Europe help lead to the creation of feudalism? (7.6.3)
7. **Making Inferences** The Middle Ages is sometimes called the “Dark Ages.” Why do you think this is so? (REP 5)

**Activity**
**Creating a Diary Entry** Use library resources to explore the life led by monastery monks. Use the information to create a diary entry for a day in the life of a monk. (7.6.2)