

# Summary: The Middle Ages

## Western Europe in Collapse

By the fifth century, the Roman army was weak. It could no longer fight off enemies. Finally, the empire's government broke down. People left the towns and cities. Travel and trade became unsafe. The people of Rome turned to military leaders and the Catholic Church for help.

The military leader Charlemagne brought order to much of the Roman Empire. The Pope made Charlemagne emperor. The government grew strong again under Charlemagne's rule. Education also improved. After Charlemagne died, Western Europe was left without a good leader.

The Middle Ages is also known as the medieval era. It was the time between the fall of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the modern world. Medieval life centered around the church. The church held worship services and took care of the sick, poor, elderly, and orphans. Monks and nuns gave their lives to the church.

Nobles and the church owned most of the land. They began feudalism and manorialism to protect their land. Under feudalism, a noble gave land to a lesser noble, called a vassal. The vassal agreed to protect the more powerful noble with knights, soldiers, and weapons.

Under manorialism, peasants lived on a lord's manor. The peasants farmed the land and gave the crops to the lord. In return, the lord protected the peasants.

## Medieval Ways of Life

Manor houses and castles had thick walls and few windows. They were dark, cold, and damp. Peasants lived in small homes with dirt floors and straw roofs. They often kept farm animals in their homes.

New ways of farming began by the middle of the 11th century. More crops were grown in Western Europe. Fewer farmers were needed. As a result, people moved to towns. They bought property and started businesses. Later, guilds were formed. A guild was a special group that protected workers' rights. The guild set wages and prices and also settled arguments.



### Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

**medieval** *noun*, the period between the end of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the modern world

**feudalism** *noun*, a system in which nobles gave land to less powerful nobles who agreed to do jobs for them

**manorialism** *noun*, a system in which a lord protected peasants who worked on his land and gave him food

**guild** *noun*, a group of people working in the same kind of business who band together to protect their rights



### After You Read

**REVIEW** Who provided leadership during the Middle Ages? Circle the sentence that tells the answer.

**REVIEW** What role did manors play in the feudal system? Draw a box around the paragraph that tells about manorialism.

**REVIEW** Why did people create guilds? Highlight the sentence that tells reasons why people created guilds.