

# Feudalism

The basic government and society in Europe during the Middle Ages was based around the feudal system. Small communities were formed around the local lord and the manor. The lord owned the land and everything in it. He would keep the peasants safe in return for their service. The lord, in return, would provide the king with soldiers or taxes.

## Service for Land

Under the feudal system land was granted to people for service. It started at the top with the king granting his land to a baron for soldiers all the way down to a peasant getting land to grow crops.

## The Manor

The center of life in the Middle Ages was the manor. The manor was run by the local lord. He lived in a large house or castle where people would gather for celebrations or for protection if they were attacked. A small village would form around the castle which would include the local church. Farms would then spread out from there which would be worked by the peasants.

## Hierarchy of Rulers:

**King** - The top leader in the land was the king. The king could not control all of the land by himself, so he divided it up among the Barons. In return, the Barons pledged their loyalty and soldiers to the king. When a king died, his firstborn son would inherit the throne. When one family stayed in power for a long time, this was called a dynasty.

**Bishop** - The Bishop was the top church leader in the kingdom and managed an area called a diocese. The Catholic Church was very powerful in most parts of Medieval Europe and this made the Bishop powerful as well. Not only that, but the church received a tithe of 10 percent from all the people. This made some Bishops very rich.

**Baron** - Barons ruled large areas of land called fiefs. They reported directly to the king and were very powerful. They divided up their land among Lords who ran individual manors. Their job was to maintain an army that was at the king's service. If they did not have an army, sometimes they would pay the king a tax instead. This tax was called shield money.

**Lord** - The lords ran the local manors. They also were the knights and could be called into battle at any moment by their Baron. The lords owned everything on their land including the peasants, crops, and village.

## Peasants or Serfs

Most of the people living in the Middle Ages were peasants. They had a hard rough life. Some peasants were considered free and could own their own businesses like carpenters, bakers, and blacksmiths. Others were more like slaves. They owned nothing and were pledged to their local lord. They worked long days, 6 days a week, and often barely had enough food to survive.

## Fun Facts about the Middle Age Feudal System

- Around 90 percent of the people worked the land as peasants.
- Peasants worked hard and died young. Most were dead before they reached 30 years old.
- The kings believed they were given the right to rule by God. This was called "divine right".
- Lords and Barons swore oaths of homage and fealty to their kings.
- The Lord held absolute power over the fief or manor including holding court and deciding punishments for crimes

# Middle Ages Feudalism Quiz

- 1) Who was the top leader in the land with the feudal system?
  - The king
  - The prime minister
  - The president
  - The serf
- 2) What was life like for the majority of the people that lived in the Middle Ages under the feudal system?
  - They lived in nice castles
  - They were soldiers who fought invaders
  - They hung out at the local pub
  - They worked hard as peasant farmers
- 3) What building, owned by the local lord, was the center of daily life in the feudal system?
  - The church
  - The capital building
  - The forum
  - The manor
- 4) Who was the leader of the Catholic Church in a kingdom?
  - The pope
  - The priest
  - The bishop
  - The pastor
- 5) The Bishops of the Catholic Church were typically poor and had little power in the kingdom.  
TRUE FALSE
- 6) Who owned everything in a village, including the crops, town, and peasants?
  - The king
  - The lord
  - The bishop
- 7) Who reported directly to the king and ruled large areas of land called fiefs?
  - The lord
  - The bishop
  - The baron
  - The cardinal
- 8) What was the responsibility of the Baron?
  - To provide soldiers to the king when needed
  - To swear loyalty to the king
  - To oversee the lords on their land
  - All of the above
  - None of the above
- 9) When a king died, who would typically take over the throne?
  - His wife, the queen
  - The bishop
  - The lord
  - His firstborn son
- 10) What did the peasants get in return for serving and working for their local lord?
  - Protection from invaders
  - A long happy life
  - The right to vote for the king
  - Lots of food and the weekends off