

Intro to the Medieval Era

The Medieval Era, often called The Middle Ages or the Dark Ages, began just before 500 A.D. following a great loss of power throughout Europe by the Roman Emperor. The Middle Ages span roughly 1,000 years, ending around 1450 A.D. (Medieval actually means "Middle"!)

In The Middle Ages people were busy:

- Building great Cathedrals as there was a huge rise in Christianity
- Building Great castles for local nobility
- Clearing large tracts of land by peasants and slaves for their Lords and Kings
- New towns and villages were popping up all over Europe

The period was one of human growth and development, great political upheaval and violence, resulting in the foundation of many of today's modern European countries.

Life in The Middle Ages

The Medieval Era held for it's people everything from lavish banquets to the cold harsh reality of working the land and sometimes living with harsh, uncertain, and often dangerous conditions.

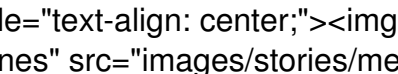
For safety and for defense, people formed small communities around a central Lord or Master. Most lived on a Manor, which consisted of the Castle, the Church, the Village, and the surrounding Farm Land. These Manors were isolated, with only occasional visits from peddlers or pilgrims on their way to the Crusades or soldiers from other fiefdoms (kingdoms).

Feudalism ~ The King awarded land grants to his most important nobles, like Barons and Bishops, in return for their contribution of soldiers for the King's armies. Lords could have a variety of other official titles including Earl, Marquis or Viscount. Lords did more than fund wars. They were the local justice and held court for local matters.

Lords provided some of their land to **Vassals**, or tenants who were a somewhat higher class than peasants. Vassals were required to serve guard duty, and later they paid a fee to acquire mercenaries (soldiers-for-hire).

At the lowest class of society were the **Peasants**, also called "serfs" or "villeins." Peasants provided the Lord with labor or a share of the produce or livestock yielded from his lands in exchange for protection, land to work and a place to live.

NEXT >>> Living in a Medieval Village

A medieval castle in Carcassonne, France, with its distinctive towers and battlements.