



## MEDIAEVAL PERIOD IN EUROPE



This chapter will discuss a few important developments, namely spread of Christianity, the feudal system, the Crusades and their influence on European Civilization.

### Introduction to the Mediaeval Period

History of Europe is divided into three major periods for convenience of study.

- (1) **Ancient period**
- (2) **Mediaeval period**
- (3) **Modern period**

#### Ancient period

This covers the period from the prehistoric times to the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when the ancient Greek - Roman Civilizations thrived.

#### Mediaeval period

After the fall of the Roman Empire, there arose a period of confusion in Europe. This period which lasted up to the 15<sup>th</sup> century is known as the Mediaeval Period. There was a gradual development during this period based on Christianity and the church.

#### Modern Period

After the 15<sup>th</sup> century a new period of civilization emerged. That development continues even up to now. This is called the Modern Period.

## Mediaeval Period is

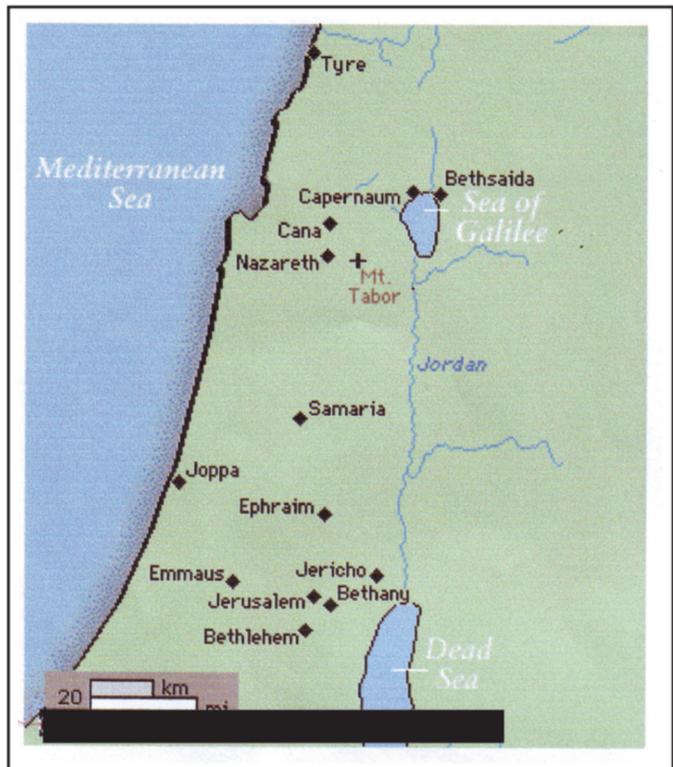
- (1) The period in between two bright periods of civilizations.
- (2) It existed between the ancient and the modern periods but was far behind in achievement compared to those periods.

Christianity was the first organised religion in Europe. It was the main religious force that shaped the European Civilization.

## Origin and Expansion of Christianity

### Origin of Christianity

The founder of Christianity is Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem, a small village in Palastine. Christian era we use today begins with his birth. His mother was Vrigin Mary who has been honoured by Christians. Jews were under the Roman Empire at the time of his birth. One part of Palastine called Galili was under a Jewish king called Herod. He was under the Roman empire. The Governer of Jerusalem was Pilath .



Map 5.1 Palastine at the time Jesus was born

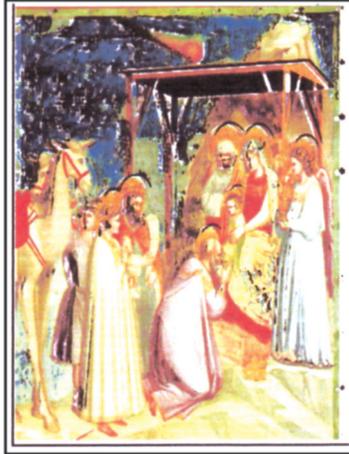


Figure 5.1 Birth of Jesus

There was a belief in Jewish that a saviour would come to save the Jews. They strongly believed in his arrival when they were under the Roman Empire. It was John the Baptist who prepared the people to welcome the Saviour preaching about him. Jesus recieved baptism from him and became an itinerant preacher at the age of 30. His public life was limited to a very short time of three years.

The Old Testament of the Bible contains teaching of Judaism while the New Testament contains the teachings of Jesus. Both the old and new Testaments are collectively considered as the Bible. The Holy Bible is the holy book of the Christians.

Teachings of Jesus are known as Christianity and it preaches of a kingdom of God which is filled with justice, love and kindness.

Jesus preached that he was the son of God who had come to this world to redeem sinners. The duty of Jesus was to establish the kingdom of God in this world.

The followings are some of his main teachings.

- It is God who has created the entire universe and all beings.
- God is the most merciful father.
- The kingdom of God is a kingdom of love, peace and justice.
- That Kingdom has already started in our hearts.

- We must repent on our sins and create ourselves to accept the kingdom of God.



Figure5.2 A Church in Rome

- Love is the noblest.
- We should love one another and live as brothers as God loves us.
- We must always pray to God with utmost faith.

Jesus preached using fables and examples in simple language so that ordinary people could understand.

Jesus came here not to destroy the judaism but to complete it. However, because of some of the teachings of Jesus and because he had said that he was the son of God, leaders and priests of Judaism opposed him and took actions to kill Jesus. They captured Jesus and accused him that he aroused people against Caesar, the Roman emporer. Those days the method of killing the traitors was the crucifixion.

Pilath, the the governor, ordered Jesus to be crucified as the Jewish leaders compelled him to do so.

Jesus often preached his disciples that he would be given away by the Jewish leaders but he would arise from death the third day from his death. Jesus arose from death as he had said and was visible to his disciples very often. The core of Christianity is that Jesus arose frome death the third day from his death. This incident is celebrated in the Easter.

The word Christianity is derived from the original word “Christos” meaning “crowned” and the religion known as Christianity is built on the teachings of Jesus.

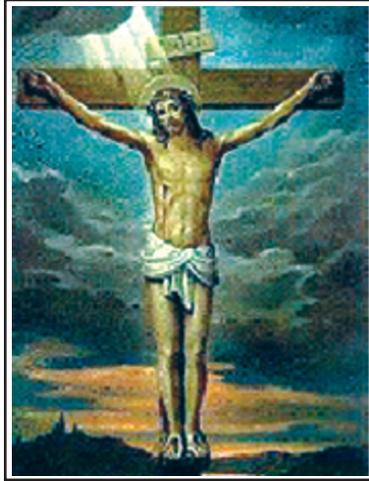


Figure 5.3 Crucifixion

Exercise : What is the relationship between Jesus and the Jews?



### Student Activity

Compile a booklet explaining the following :-  
Bible, Virgin Mary, Son of God, Creator, Christianity.

## Expansion of Christianity

The expansion of Christianity took place after the death of Jesus Christ. He had 12 chief disciples known as apostles who had dispersed in different directions. However, after the resurrection of Christ from the dead, a new wave of enthusiasm of his teachings began to sweep through people. The 12 apostles then got together and started preaching the religion.

Once the miraculous news about the resurrection began to spread around, many Jews began to embrace Christianity at a fast rate. Slaves and women who were considered to be of low status in society were among them. Romans who did not like the popularity of the new religion adopted various methods to destroy it and those who embraced it.

## Punishments meted out to Christians

- \* Christians were punished on charges such as non payment of taxes and not serving in the army.
- \* They were thrown in batches to hungry lions.
- \* Rome caught fire when emperor Nero was playing the violin.
- \* The Christians were charged for this act and were massacred. With the increase of martyrs more and more people converted into Christianity.

In the end, Christianity became the official religion and the only religion legally accepted by the Roman Empire.

Constantine had to seek the assistance of Christians to become the emperor. After ascending the throne with the help of the Christians he enacted the Milan decree in 313 A.D declaring Christianity to be one of the legal religions in the empire.

- \* Later he himself became a Christian. In 380 A.D Emperor Theodosius declared all other religions as heresies and prohibited to follow them. From then onwards Christianity was made the religion of the empire and it spread very fast.

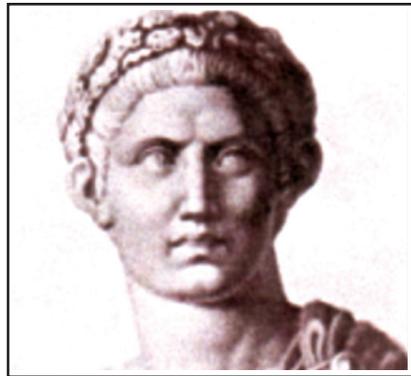


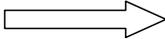
Figure 5.4 Emperor Constantine

In 313 A.D Emperor Constantine made Christianity a legally valid religion of the whole of Roman Empire. In 380 A.D. Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire.

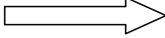
## Pope and the Assembly of Christ/Church

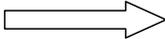
### Origins of the Christian Church

The disciples of Jesus established a formal organisation to spread the religion. On this occasion they were conferred the posts of “Bishop”. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Patriarchs were appointed for cities of importance such as Rome, Jerusalem, Constantinople, Antioch, Alexandria and Metropolitans were appointed to bigger areas. While ‘Bishops’ were appointed to be in charge of cities, priests were appointed to take charge of rural areas.

In charge of large areas            Metropolitan Bishop

In charge of important cities       Patriarch Bishop

In charge of cities            Bishop

In charge of rural areas            Priests

Among all these bishops, the one in Rome was considered as the most important. This Metropolitan Bishop was entrusted with the management of all churches. Later the position was developed as Papacy.

### Papacy

Papacy became an exceedingly powerful institution during the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Pope and the Christian Church rose against the barbarian tribes which destroyed the Roman Empire.

The tribes such as Ostrogoths, Visigoths, Franks and Anglo Saxons who lived outside the Roman Empire settled in Italy, Spain, France and England respectively after defeating the Roman Empire.

Christian Church with the leadership of the Pope was able to convert these tribes which were powerful enough even to destroy the Roman Empire.

During the Medieval Period, Church led by the Pope was able to override all kings in each country in Europe. It was able to own large extents of land, hold monopoly of all educational activities and collect taxes from every country in Europe. During this time Christians considered Pope as the God's representative on Earth.

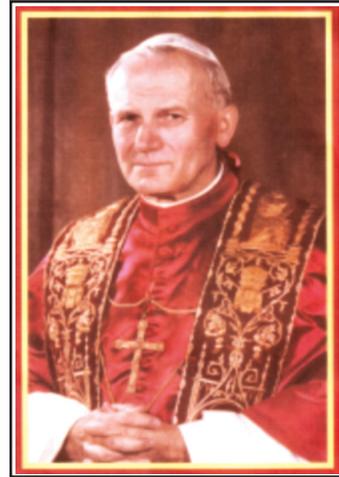


Figure 5.5 Pope

Based on the theory that God is infallible the Christians believed that Pope as the representative of God is also infallible.

The increase in power of the bishops, and priests along with the Pope tended towards corruption. By the 13<sup>th</sup> century the learned people began to question their activities. The final result was the rise of the Reformation Movement in the 16<sup>th</sup> century A.D. when the Pope and the Church became very weak. Consequently Christian Churches in various parts of Europe broke away from the Roman Church bringing about religious disunity and war.

## Feudal System

### Introduction

The economic, social and political system based on land tenure and service that existed during the Medieval Period in Europe is known as feudalism.

In Medieval Europe nobles who enjoyed king's lands served him in return.

The people who enjoyed the lands of the nobles had to serve them in return.

Feudal system is where a person is paid for the services with a plot of land, which he is expected to work continuously as a serf. Almost all European countries during the Medieval Period implemented this system.

Accordingly, all countries in the Medieval Period had special features in political, economic, social - cultural spheres. These characteristics help to distinguish them from the ancient and modern periods.

### **Origins of Feudalism**

In Europe feudalism started in the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. after the fall of the Roman Empire. The major cause for the origin of feudalism was foreign invasions. Between the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D and 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. there were two major series of foreign invasions into Europe.

- (1) The first series of invasions were from Goths, Huns, Franks, Slavs, Vandals, Lombards and Anglo Saxons; the tribes which came from Germany a region that the Romans could not conquer.
- (2) The second invasion is the Vikings who came from the Northern countries of Norway, Sweden and Denmark in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

In the face of these invasions Roman chiefs were not able to provide protection to the people. Hence the people handed over their lands to the neighbouring aristocrats and expected protection in turn. Thus the aristocrats became powerful land owners and the ordinary people were reduced to the position of serfs.

The Kings were weak. They depended on the aristocrats to defend and protect the kingdom. Kings therefore handed over their lands to the aristocrats who in turn had to serve the kings.

A body of customs and manners relating to the services that should be performed in lieu of such lands came to be built. Eventhough there were no written records, the traditions continued without interruptions.

Thus after the fall of the Roman Empire and the barbarian invasions the following changes took place in Europe.

- Breakdown of political stability.
- Weakened power of the kings.
- Lack of organized administrative systems among barbarian tribes, who occupied various regions in Europe
- Condition of anarchy in Europe.
- Need of protection for the people.

Under these circumstances kings became weak while the aristocrats became powerful. A new system was developed to meet the need of the people and to establish political stability in the countries. This system where services were paid with land and money transactions were very rare, is known as feudalism.

### **Special features of the Feudal Economic system**

- Land was the major source of production.
- Agriculture was the basis of economy.
- Self sufficient economic system.
- Village was the main centre of people's lives.
- There were very few cities.
- Absence of money transactions.
- Trading activities were very limited and that too was based on the barter systems.

The unit of land used for agriculture was known as “Manor”

The land in the “Manor” was used in common by the people who lived in it. There was a forest area that supplied firewood, honey, and meat while there was a grassland which provided food for their animals.

The aristocrats who owned all the land in the “Manor” distributed them among the common people known as serfs to earn their living

by cultivating them. In return they had to provide free service to cultivate the aristocrat's plot of land and also had to pay him various dues together with gifts on ceremonial occasions.

The aristocrat had a magnificent mansion on the manor. There was a church at the highest point. Machinery for making wine, grinding wheat, and the bakery were owned by the aristocrats and had to pay to get the services from them. They could pay in goods.

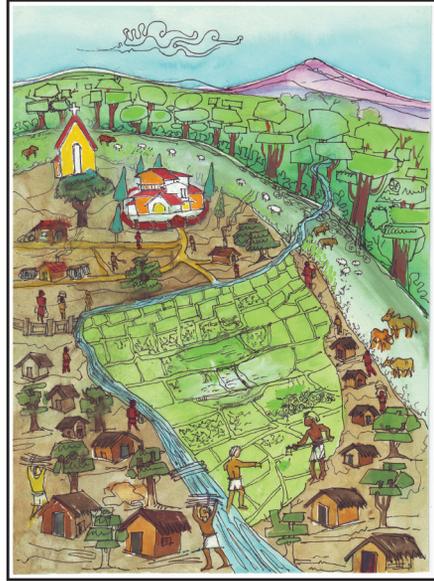


Figure 5.6 Illustration of a manor in Europe

Under the feudal economic system the manor was a self sufficient unit.

### Special Features of the Feudal Political System

- Acceptance of the fact that all lands belonged to king.
- The King was not powerful.
- King handed over his lands to aristocrats to get the necessary services from them. Accordingly, they became holders of vast areas of land.
- The aristocratic owner of manors became very powerful.

They enforced laws

collected taxes

implemented judicial activities

built and maintained armies

King had no standing army. When an army was needed he had to depend on the aristocrats who built and maintained armies. The provincial aristocratic rulers fought among themselves very often to extend their power. These fights were called 'duels'.

The political feudal system was a system where the kings were weak while the provincial chiefs were powerful. Hence it was an anarchical situation to some extent.

## Feudal Social System

Feudal system did not consider people as equals. They were either high or low according to birth.

- There were four distinctive groups in society. They were the kings, lords, clergy and common people.
- Aristocrats led luxurious lives in magnificent mansions.
- The serfs led miserable lives in small huts.
- Only the aristocrats had the privilege of holding posts in the government and to hold land. They were also exempted from taxes.
- The serfs who had no privilege at all had to pay taxes to the king, to the aristocrats and to the church.
- In the feudal system, the person was of no significance. Collectivity was the common feature in life. The guild was the collective organization.

All creations were anonymous. However, if a name of the creator is given, it is the name of the guild and not the name of the author.

All social activities of the common people including cultivation were performed by mutual self help and they led peaceful lives, but among aristocrats there was competition for power.

## Feudal Cultural System

The feudal cultural system was organised in the same manner as the political, economic and social systems. Accordingly, the cultural features of the period were also different from those of the ancient and the modern periods.

### Cultural Features -

In Europe under the Feudal System

- In religious activities Pope and the Church occupied the leading position.
- Priests had a monopoly in educational matters.
- Lives of people were organized in a religious manner.
- All cultural activities had a religious form.
- Music, dance, art, sculpture and all other cultural spheres did not have a worldly approach but were spiritual, and religious in outlook.
- People were trained to live peacefully in a co-operative and an orderly manner.

## Decline of the Feudal System

Feudal system which developed for over many centuries from 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. started its decline gradually. There are several reasons for this decline.

- The crusades that will be discussed later in this chapter was the main reason.
- The 'Manor' the basis of feudal system was destroyed due to crusades.
- Development of trade.
- Development of cities.
- Increased use of currency.
- Death of many aristocrats who were involved in wars.
- Refusal of serfs to return to serfdom after serving in the army.

- Establishment of monarchies under powerful kings caused the decline of political feudal system.
- With the fall of the manor the social status of aristocrats also went down leading to a breakdown of the social feudal system.
- Renaissance that originated in the 13<sup>th</sup> century with increased learning was instrumental in bringing about decline in religious and cultural features of the feudal society.

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century almost all the countries in Europe saw the beginning of the modern era after the decline of the feudal system. Accordingly, the following are the main features of the Modern Period.

1. Trade activities came to the forefront instead of agriculture.
2. Birth of big cities.
3. Increased use of currency.
4. A middle class which earned money became important in society.
5. The powers of aristocrats became weak; kings became powerful.
6. National states were emerging, while the provincial rulers became powerless.
7. Pope and the Church came under criticism.



### **Student Activities**

- List the reasons for the decline of the feudal system.  
Write an article to a wall journal on “Feudal System in the Medieval Europe.”
- Comparing the Medieval and the Modern Periods, list the outstanding features.

Exercises :

- Describe what is meant by the Medieval Period.
- What are the features of the feudal political system?

## The Crusades

We learnt how Jesus, the founder of Christianity was born in Bethlehem and was crucified in nearby Jerusalem. These regions are considered as holy places even today by all Christians. Palastine which was under the Romans came under Arab rule in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D. But the Christians were not obstructed and were free to visit or worship those sacred places in Palastine. However in the 11<sup>th</sup> century these areas came under the aggressive Seljuk Turks.

They obstructed the Christians who were visiting the holy places. They not only harassed them but even killed them.

Pope who was disturbed about this situation called upon the Christians to come forward to protect their ancient places of religious importance in Palastine. In response to his call large armies were organized by the rulers of France, England, Spain and Italy under the aristocrats.

These wars which took place between the Christians and the Muslims from about the 11<sup>th</sup> century to the 15<sup>th</sup> century are known in history as the Crusades. However, the Christians did not achieve much success. In 1453 A.D. the Ottoman Turks who were Muslims captured Constantinople, the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire itself. This was a great defeat for the Christians.

## Results of Crusades

The Crusades brought about important changes in the history of Europe.

- \* As a result of the Crusades Europeans who were living in feudal Europe came into contact with the Arabs who were engaged largely in trade and commerce. This was one of the factors which led to the increase in trading activities in Europe and the rise of the middle class.

- \* Another result of the Crusades was the destruction and exhaustion of European feudal aristocrats and their armies which in turn led to the weakening of feudalism.
- \* Contact with the Arabs led to the transmission of knowledge from the East. For example, Arab numerals, Algebra and Philosophy.
- \* Europeans also learned about the use of such things as paper and compass.
- \* In Europe the demand for commercial articles such as spices, silk, muslin, sugar, medicines, precious stones, glassware and fresh fruits increased. The increase in demand for such commodities led to the development of trade between Europe and the East.
- \* Thus the Europeans who lived a secluded life in the Medieval Period were exposed to the outside world due to the Crusades.



### **Student Activity**

Write an article to a children's newspaper on the topic 'Importance of Crusades in the Medieval Period'

### **Exercise**

Explain what Crusades. and As a result of the Crusades what did the Europe get from the East?