

STORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES

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Gertrude and John Van Duyn Southworth
Revised and Updated by Michael J. McHugh

ORIGINALLY ENTITLED: *The Story of the Middle Ages*

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY: Iroquois Publishing Company, Inc. Syracuse, NY © 1934

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2020 Printing, Softbound Edition

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A publication of

Christian Liberty Press

502 West Euclid Avenue

Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004

www.christianlibertypress.com

Scripture references are conformed to The Holy Bible, New King James Version © 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., so that modern readers may gain greater comprehension of the Word of God.

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CHRISTIAN LIBERTY PRESS
502 West Euclid Avenue
Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004
www.christianlibertypress.com

ISBN 978-1-629820-38-5 (Print)
978-1-629820-39-2 (eBook PDF)

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORY REVOLVES AROUND CHRIST

Did you ever wonder why historians often divide history according to the time before Christ (B.C.) and the period after He was born (A.D.—*anno Domini*, which means “in the year of the Lord”)? It is because all of world history revolves around or centers upon the work of Christ in history. No other person in all of human history compares to Jesus Christ. The fact that Jesus Christ is the author of history and has changed the course of world events more than any other person, qualifies Him for the distinction of being at the center of world history. This is in spite of the fact that He was born in poverty and lived a very short and simple existence on Earth. A truly wise student of history is one who recognizes the preeminent status of Christ. Every event from Creation to Calvary pointed toward the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, every event after Christ’s resurrection looks forward to His return as the conquering King of kings.

Christians joyfully acknowledge the fact that the Son of God, Jesus Christ, was able to have a miraculous impact upon world history, because of His dual nature as Almighty God and sinless man; and yet secular historians have also marveled at what Christ accomplished in His humanity. It is noteworthy that the unbelieving world is commonly willing to give a certain degree of recognition to the accomplishments of Christ because He was such an extraordinary figure. Consider for a few moments the following facts concerning the Christ of history:



*Christ alone is King of kings
and Lord of lords*

Jesus was a man conceived of the Holy Spirit, born in an obscure village, the child of a Jewish peasant woman. He grew up in another obscure village. He worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty, and then for three years was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held political office. He never had a family. He never went to college. He seldom put his foot inside a big city. He never traveled 200 miles from the place where He was born. He never did one of the things that the world would call great. While He was still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against Him. His friends ran away. He was turned over to His enemies. He went through a trial that was a mockery of justice.

His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He had—His coat. After Christ was unjustly executed, He was taken down and laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. After three days, He arose from the dead, but because He did not appear before unbelievers, His resurrection and ascension were never recognized. Twenty wide centuries have come and gone, and today, He is the Centerpiece of much of the human race. All the armies that have ever marched, ... all the navies that ever were built, ... all the parliaments that ever sat, ... all the kings that ever reigned ... **PUT TOGETHER** ... have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that ... **ONE SOLITARY LIFE.**

As we begin to study the events of history that unfolded after the earthly ministry of Christ, we must be sure to give Him proper acknowledgment as the King of kings and Lord of lords. As Paul the Apostle told the leaders at Athens, in the first century after Christ, “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings...” (Acts 17:24–26).

When we study history, we study the effects of God’s eternal purposes upon people and nations. From the beginning of time, the Triune God has been at work to ordain and to accomplish His purposes through every event that happens. The Lord created all the different nationalities of people—Americans, Australians, Chinese, Egyptians, Germans, Brazilians, and more. It is God’s perfect will and sovereign power that causes nations to rise and fall. The Lord raises up kings and humbles princes, for all power belongs to God and He loans a portion of His power to those of His choosing for a season.

It is the Lord, therefore, who chooses where on Earth each nation should be located and which boundaries—rivers, mountains, oceans—that should fence them in. As many writers have noted, all of history is actually “His Story.” The wisdom of Almighty God in planning each and every detail of history to accomplish His purposes is truly incredible. All praise and honor belong to the powerful God of Scripture who causes everything to happen just as He has planned for His own glory.

No student of history should ever be foolish enough to think that the story of world history is simply a record of man’s accomplishments and failures over the ages. True history is preoccupied with analyzing world events in the light of God’s plan to redeem a community of believers unto Himself out of every nation and tribe through the Gospel of Christ. For this reason, the progress of the church—which is made up of believers from every nation—should be of paramount interest to historians. Sadly, however, students of history often refuse to acknowledge God’s providential control over world events. In the end, such secular historians rob themselves of the privilege of glorying in the acts of the Almighty Creator by choosing to focus upon the acts of sinful creatures alone.

THE MIDDLE AGES

The Middle Ages was an important period in world history, because it prepared the way for (1) the great spiritual awakening, known as the Reformation, and (2) the spread of the Gospel during the Age of Exploration. The Middle Ages received its name due to the fact that this time period takes place between ancient and modern times. The time we call the Middle Ages began in A.D. 476, the year when the Germanic tribes overthrew the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire. It ended more than a thousand years later, about 1500. This was shortly after the voyages of Columbus to the Americas. The first part of the Middle Ages, from A.D. 476 until about the year A.D. 1000, is known as the Dark Ages, because during this time many people in Western Europe were ignorant, poor, and miserable. Not long after the Dark Ages, during a transitional period within the Middle Ages, the Crusades began. For

almost two hundred years, from A.D. 1096 until A.D. 1291, the people of Western Europe sent army after army into southwestern Asia to try to take the Holy Land of Palestine and keep it under Christian control. The last part of the Middle Ages is known as the Renaissance, or High Middle Ages. This was a time when the people of Western Europe began to take an interest in art and learning and to make discoveries and inventions. The Renaissance lasted from about A.D. 1300 until about A.D. 1500.

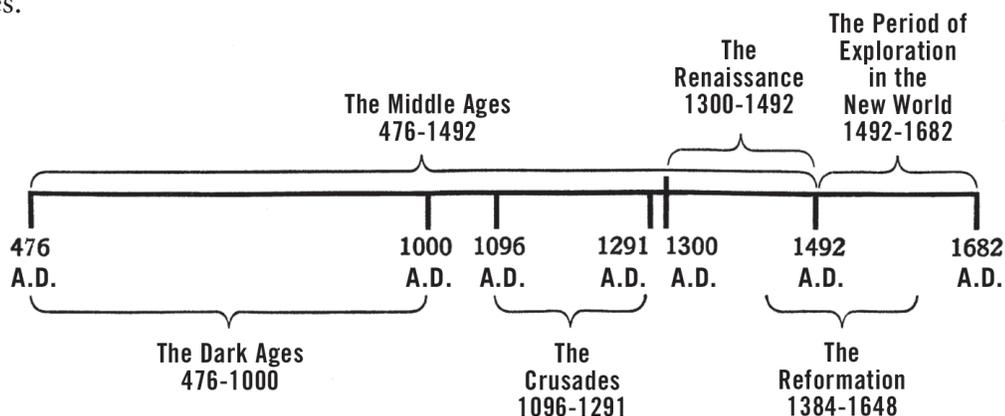
THE REFORMATION

The Renaissance closed as the great Protestant Reformation era began. This era lasted from A.D. 1517, when Luther wrote his *Ninety-five Theses*, until A.D. 1648, when the Westminster Confession of Faith was adopted by England and Scotland. During the High Middle Ages, God began to move in the hearts of men such as John Wycliffe, in England, and John Huss, in Bohemia. These and many others began to criticize the doctrines and government of the Roman Catholic Church. Wealth and power had so corrupted the Church that radical reform was necessary. “In the fullness of time” the Reformation came into full bloom, when the conditions were ripe. God used such men as Martin Luther and John Calvin to bring about this radical reform, which spread throughout Europe and even to the British colonies in North America. During this era, many Confessions of Faith and catechisms—delineating the truths of Scripture—were written, such as Luther’s *Shorter Catechism*, Calvin’s *Catechism*, the *Gallic Confession* (France), the *Belgic Confession* (The Netherlands), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (Germany), the *Thirty-nine Articles* (England), and the *Westminster Confession of Faith*—including the *Larger* and *Shorter Catechisms*.

THE AGE OF EXPLORATION

The Middle Ages was followed by the Age of Exploration, which lasted from about 1492 until 1682. During this period of time, daring explorers from Europe crossed sea and land to discover unknown parts of the New World and claim them as possessions of the countries under whose flags they sailed. During this time, many explorers and missionaries also took the Gospel to many parts of the known world.

The following timeline shows the various periods of history, which will be covered in this book. Carefully examine this timeline. You will find it helpful to refer back to it as you study about the Middle Ages.



Chapter 2

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND CHRISTIANITY

More than two thousand years ago (27 B.C.), the people of Rome conquered much of the known world and brought it under their rule. All problems which arose in the different countries that Rome had conquered were settled by their Roman governors or by the Roman emperor himself. The Roman armies did any fighting which had to be done. More and more, the people of the conquered countries came to depend on Rome for almost everything. For more than four hundred years, the Romans held their great empire together. Then Rome lost her power and many of the countries she had ruled were left without governments and without protection.



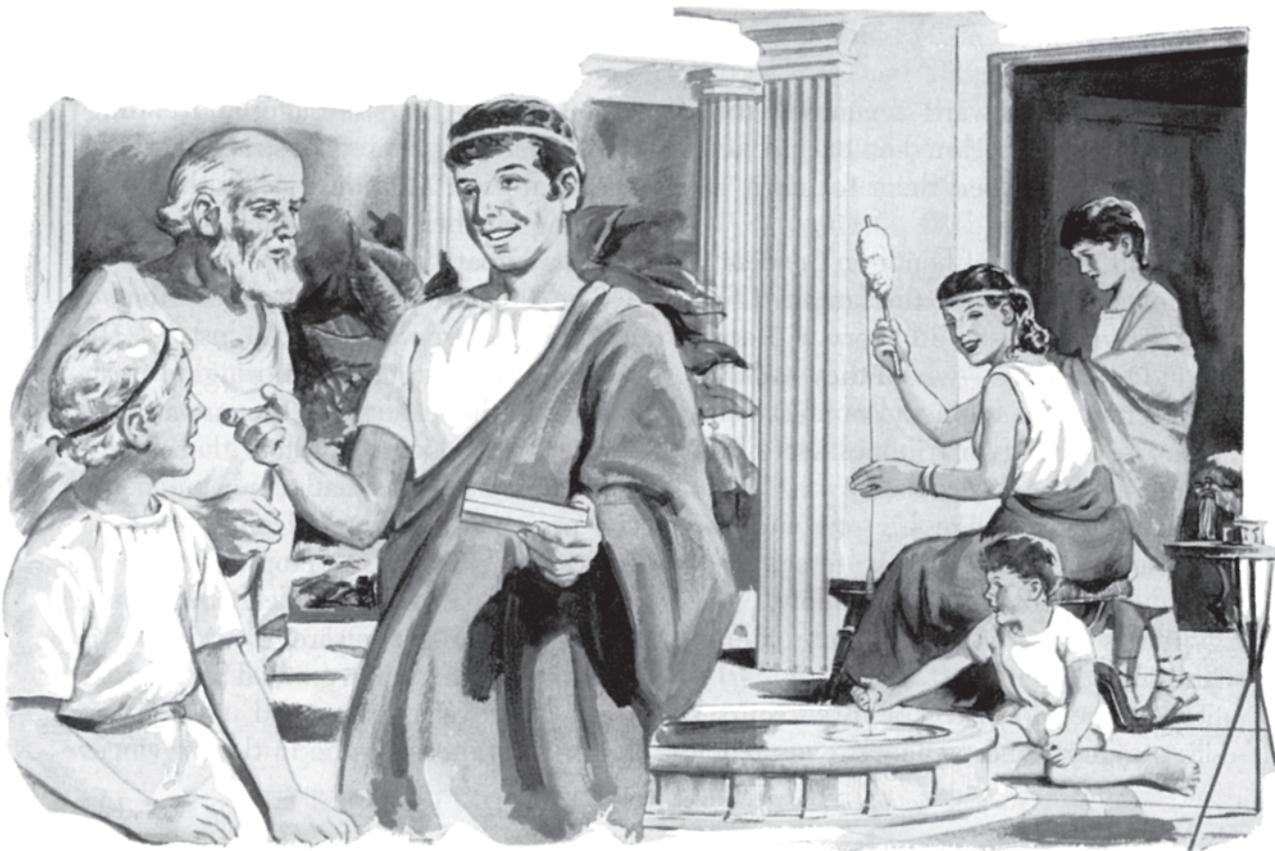
The Roman Empire dominated the ancient world prior to the opening of the Middle Ages.

The Roman Empire

Halfway down the western slope of the Central Apennines Mountains in Italy stands a group of seven hills. On these hills, more than twenty-seven hundred years ago, the city of Rome was founded.

From the earliest days, the Romans were great fighters. They captured neighboring towns one by one until, in time, they ruled all of Italy. Still they were not satisfied. Their armies on land, and their ships upon the sea, conquered nation after nation. Western and Southern Europe, as well as many countries of Asia and Africa, came under Roman rule. The taxes that these conquered peoples paid made the Roman nation the richest in the world.

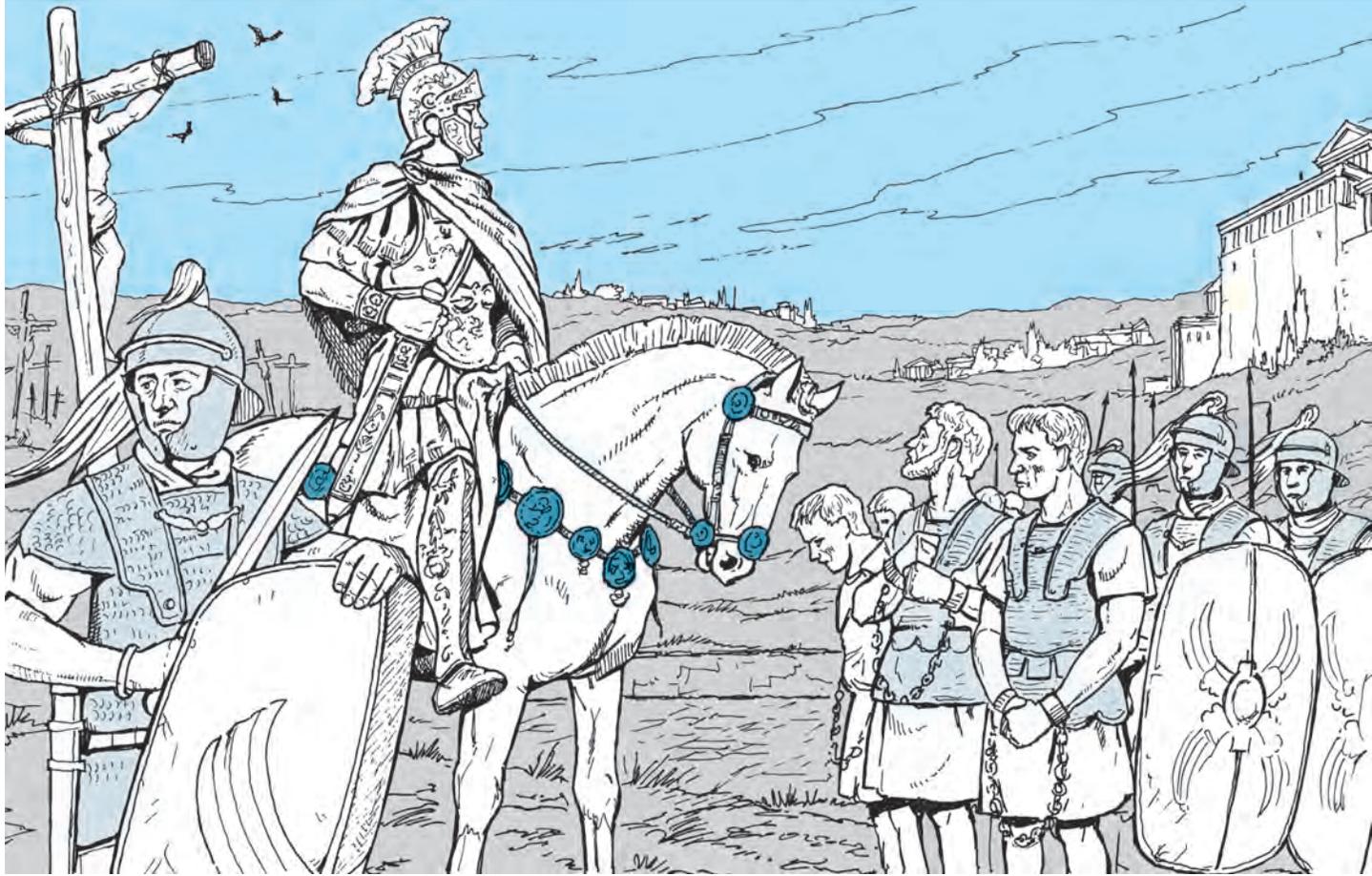
The men who ruled the mighty Roman Empire were called emperors. The greatest of these was Caesar Augustus, who became emperor in 27 B.C.—about twenty-three years before the birth of Christ. Because Augustus brought peace and prosperity to Rome, his reign was spoken of as the Golden Age, or *Pax Romana*. During the rule of Augustus and the emperors who followed him in the next one hundred and fifty years, Rome became a very beautiful city, and the empire reached the height of its power. In the early stages of the government of Rome, it functioned as a republic where much of the ruling power was vested in a body of men known as senators. The Roman Senate, which represented the people, was most active prior to the establishment of the vast Roman Empire with its powerful emperors.



At its height, Roman civilization had a highly developed culture with comprehensive laws and a refined social order.

As time went on, however, Rome became increasingly corrupt and immoral and began to lose her hold over the lands she ruled. In the early days of Rome, the people had worked together for the good of Rome. Now, however, the rich and immoral ruling class had gained control of most of the land and the poor farmers had no way to support themselves. Thousands of them flocked to the cities in search of work, but there was not enough work for them because the majority of business owners used slave labor. To prevent trouble, the government had to supply the unemployed mob with food and entertainment to

prevent rioting. These problems also forced the Roman government to raise taxes on those who could find work and the heavy taxes eventually caused such citizens to revolt.



Roman society was filled with slaves from conquered territories. On occasion, some of these slaves would unite and revolt against their Roman masters. These revolts would often end badly for the slaves as they would be captured and executed by way of crucifixion. Roman justice was quick and cruel, but the horrible death of crucifixion was normally reserved for the worst of criminals.

The Roman armies, which had been so strong, were by A.D. 250 largely made up of men from the conquered countries, which did not love Rome as the Romans had. Finally, in the year A.D. 395, which means three hundred and ninety-five years after the birth of Christ, the Roman emperor died, leaving the empire to his two sons to divide it between themselves. Rome became the capital of the Western Roman Empire and Constantinople the capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. This division of the empire weakened the power of the Romans still more as various rulers fought with each other over land disputes.

The city of Rome was overrun by barbarian tribes in A.D. 410 and the Western Roman Empire eventually collapsed in A.D. 476.



Heavy taxes and immoral laws caused the Roman Empire's fall.

The Life and Teachings of Jesus

In the days of the first Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, Jesus was born in Judea. At that time, Judea was a part of the Roman Empire, and the Roman governors treated the Jews cruelly. The Jews yearned for political freedom, and looked for a deliverer. When Jesus became a teacher and leader of His people, His lofty principles, moral courage, and miraculous power convinced His disciples and followers that He was the one that was ordained to deliver them from the yoke of Rome. Sadly, these people did not understand the true mission of the Son of God, who was sent to set elect sinners free from the bondage of their sins and provide them with eternal life.

Shortly before His crucifixion, the Messiah Jesus made a processional entry into Jerusalem, the chief city of the Roman province of Judea, with great crowds shouting loudly and proclaiming Him, “King of the Jews.” This proclamation was eventually used by a group of powerful and influential Jewish religious leaders, jealous of Christ’s popularity, as an excuse to bring Him before the Roman magistrate on charges of treason. These religious leaders conspired to bring false charges against Christ for blasphemy because He “claimed to be equal with God.” Christ was seized and taken before a religious court, where false witnesses accused Him of treason against God.

Eventually, in fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures, the Messiah Jesus was brought before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea, and ultimately was condemned to be crucified—a cruel mode of executing convicted prisoners. Although Christ Jesus was sinless, He did not die in vain. Through His death on the cross, Christ paid for the sins of His chosen people. After Jesus died, He was placed in a tomb that was sealed by a huge stone and guarded by several Roman soldiers day and night. On the third day after His death, in spite of the sealed tomb and Roman guards, Christ arose from the dead;

demonstrating His great power over sin and death. He also appeared in bodily form to hundreds of His followers. Reports soon spread far and wide concerning Christ’s resurrection and ascension to heaven, but many of the Roman and Jewish people had difficulty believing these reports.

The teachings of Jesus seemed very strange to the men of the Roman world. The Greeks and the Romans believed that there were many gods, whom they tried to please by offering sacrifices. Jesus taught that there is but one God, and that the way to please Him is by serving Him wholeheartedly ac-



The Messiah, Jesus Christ, came to the earth during the reign of Caesar Augustus and He was tried by a Roman governor named Pilate during the rule of Tiberius.

according to His commandments. He taught, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37–39). Love to God, must be first, and then love to others. Jesus gave the world its finest rule of conduct when He said, “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matthew 7:12a).

Jesus was the first teacher of real liberty in the world. Although many of the ancient Greek cities had democratic governments, only a small body of citizens had a part in them. In every Greek city, there were many slaves and other residents who had no voice in the government. The teachings of Christ elevated the status of all manner of men and gave dignity to people who were honest, hardworking, and yet poor. He taught that the true role of leaders is to serve others with compassion and humility. This means that all rulers will be judged according to how justly they used the power loaned to them by Almighty God. Jesus Christ also taught that true liberty is not the right to live as we please, but the power to live as God requires. The Gospel of Christ has the power to free people from the bondage of sin.

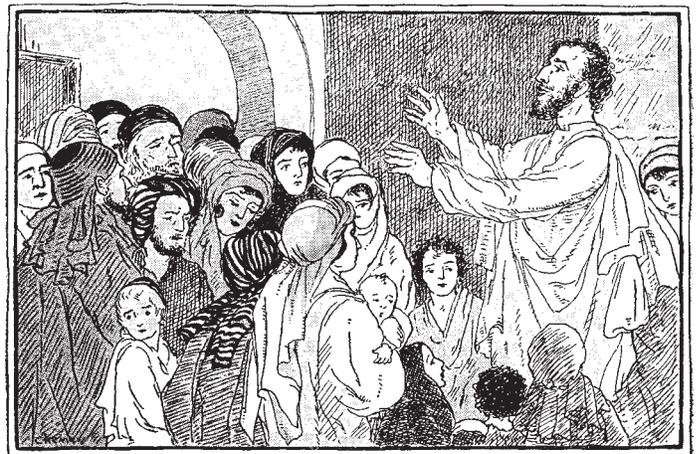
The religions of Greece and Rome did little to teach men to be good or to do right. Jesus taught that all men everywhere ought to be good. In His own pure and unselfish life He gave the world its highest ideal of character. His teachings have, sadly, never been fully adopted, even in Christian countries. The best of men fall far short of following closely in His footsteps. But in spite of man’s sinfulness, Christ’s life and His Gospel have been the greatest influence in developing the legacy of liberty that has often characterized Western culture.

The Beginnings of the Church

At the time of Christ’s death and resurrection, He had only a few hundred followers or disciples. The first converts to the Christian religion were made in Jerusalem and in the other parts of Judea. At first, it was thought that the new faith was intended only for the Jews. Then the Apostle Peter, a prominent leader among the apostles, taught that the message of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was for all peoples.

Among the early converts to the Christian faith was a Jewish tentmaker and Pharisee, Saul of Tarsus. After he became a Christian he was called Paul. This gifted man did more than anyone else to make Christianity a religion for all manner of men. For thirty years he traveled far and wide in Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy, telling the story of Jesus with burning forcefulness through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. Before his death he had gathered together, in many of the cities of the Roman Empire, church groups made up of men and women who were faithful followers of Christ seeking to live the Christian life in obedience to the teachings of the Holy Scripture.

Paul, a Roman citizen and one of Jesus’ most dedicated servants, is here preaching the Gospel to the poor. Many became Christians in the latter days of the Roman Empire.



Paul wrote letters to many of the churches that he had founded, explaining the teachings of Jesus as given to him by God the Holy Spirit. The primary message that the Apostle Paul emphasized was the need for sinful men to repent from their sins and to seek salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ on the Cross.

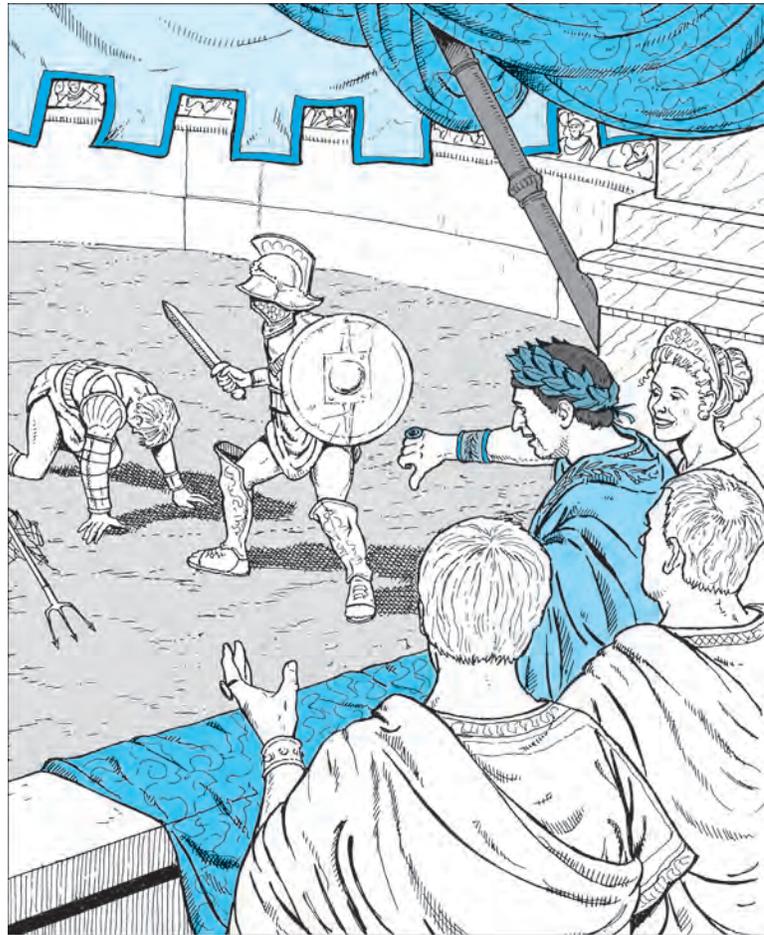
Four different accounts of the life and work of Jesus were also written. These narratives and letters, with a few other early Christian writings, make up the portion of the Bible known as the New Testament.

At first the Christian churches were little groups of believers, who met to worship together. The Christians of each community thought of themselves as brothers and gave freely of their property to support the widows, the poor, and the sick in their midst. Paul the Apostle taught that certain men should be appointed in each church as leaders to attend to the necessary business. Those who took care of the property and looked after the needs of the poor were called deacons. The leaders in each church, who taught the other members and administered the biblical sacraments of baptism and communion, were called bishops or elders. Leaders in the early Christian church were often married and continued to earn their own living just as the rest of the church members did.

The Romans Persecute the Christians

From the Church's beginning, the faith of the Christians was tried by persecution. Jesus, its great Founder, was crucified. Stephen, the first martyr, was stoned to death. Nearly all the twelve apostles paid for their faith with their lives. Paul, the "Apostle to the Gentiles," was attacked again and again, and at last his life was taken as he was beheaded in Rome.

When the Christian faith began to spread over the Roman world, the pagan people in most regions hated it. There were some reasons for this feeling. The Romans believed in a great many gods. For example, one of their gods presided over war and another over commerce. They had one goddess who watched the flocks and another who caused the grain to ripen. The Romans were willing to add the God of the Christians to those that they already worshipped, but they were not willing to throw away their own gods. This, however, was the very thing that the Christians demanded. They declared that the gods of



The leaders of Rome sponsored exciting and deadly spectacles in their Coliseum to amuse and pacify their disgruntled citizens. As Rome became more pagan and decadent, the people began to call for more bloody games. During the rise of Christianity, thousands of Christians who had been accused of disloyalty because they refused to worship and follow Caesar were tortured and killed in the Coliseum.

Rome were false gods and that they must not be worshipped. Consequently, they refused to do anything that would honor or even recognize the gods of Rome. They also refused to worship the Roman emperor as a god as the law required. They would not attend the religious feasts or entertainments of the time, nor go to the fights of the gladiators, nor even send their children to pagan Roman schools. Because the Christians thus refused to join in the social and religious life of the people around them, they were called “haters of mankind.” It is not strange that such people were misunderstood by many of the carnal and worldly people of Rome.

The Roman people feared the Christians almost as much as they disliked them. All sorts of false stories were told about the awful things they did in their secret meetings. If any great disaster happened, the Christians were thought to have caused it. One of the early Christian writers reveals, “If the Tiber rises, if the Nile does not rise, if the heavens give no rain, if there is an earthquake, famine, or pestilence straightway the cry is ‘The Christians to the lions.’”

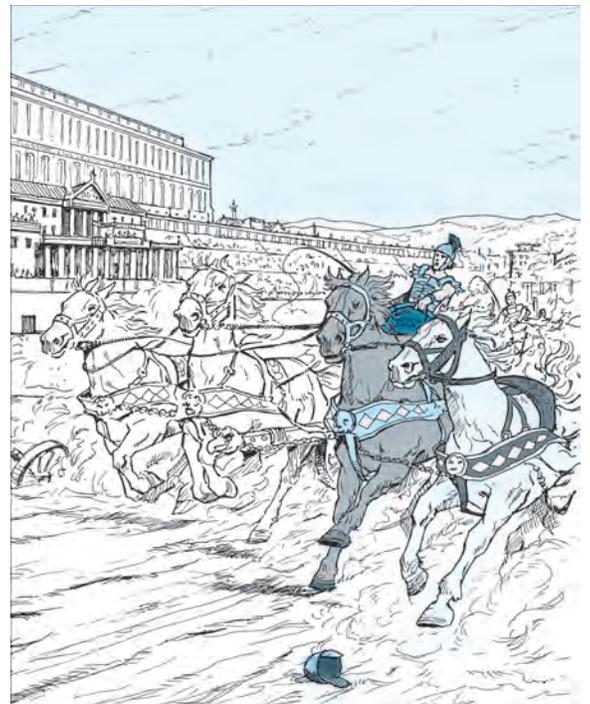
For a time, at first, the followers of Christ had attracted little attention from the Roman government. The emperors did not care what the Christians believed for they were regarded as merely a strange sect of Judaism. But when they learned that the Christians scorned the gods of the nation, would not serve in the army, and were holding secret meetings contrary to the law, they decided to suppress them by force.

On a regular basis, for nearly three hundred years, the Christians were persecuted throughout the empire. During this time there were thousands of victims. Some were tortured in every way that their cruel persecutors could invent. Many were beheaded, or burned, or crucified. Great numbers were thrown to the wild beasts in the great Coliseum at Rome.

In facing this awful persecution, the early Christians gave us the greatest example of heroic courage, fortitude in suffering, and unfaltering devotion to Christ in all the history of the world. When Blandina, a young girl, was tortured from morning until night to force her to give up her faith, she continued steadfast in saying, “I am a Christian; among us no evil is done.” When the aged bishop, Polycarp, was commanded to curse Christ, he answered, “Six and eighty years have I served Him, and He has done me nothing but good, and how could I curse Him, my Lord and my Savior!”

Instead of crushing out the religion of Christ, persecution only strengthened it and caused it to spread. The Christians who suffered were called *martyrs*, that means “witnesses.” The martyrs were steadily convincing people of the truth of a faith whose followers willingly and even joyously gave their lives to defend. It was true, as one of the early Christians said, “The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church.”

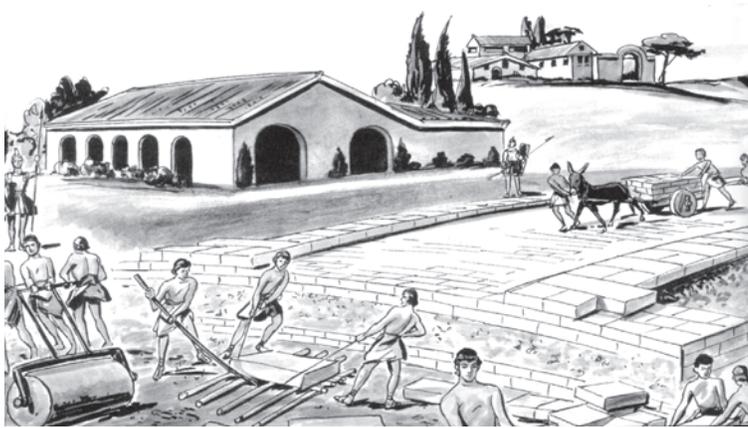
The people of Rome loved to watch the chariot races held at the arena within their impressive Coliseum.



The Triumph of the Church

The persecution of the Christians was most severe in the third century. Yet it was just at that time that the followers of Christ were increasing more rapidly than ever before. The inspiring influence of the martyrs was not the only reason for this growth. At a time when men were losing faith in the old gods of Greece and Rome, the Christians were filled with zeal and energy. Multitudes of people turned eagerly to a faith that taught them to be loving and helpful to each other in this life and gave them a sure hope of a better life in another world.

The existence of the Roman Empire itself helped the missionaries of the new faith to do their work. Its splendid roads gave ready access to every part of the known world. The fact that both the Latin and Greek languages were known and used everywhere made it easy to preach the Christian message to all people. By building up its empire, Rome had prepared the way for the rapid growth of Christianity.



One of the important accomplishments of the Roman empire was the establishment of good roads throughout many parts of southern Europe. Some of their roads were so well built that they were actively used for almost two thousand years.

accepted it. Belief in the gods of Greece and Rome steadily passed away. Before the end of the fourth century, another emperor prohibited the old pagan worship under pain of death. All the pagan temples were then torn down or changed into Christian churches.

This triumph of the Christian Church was a long step forward in God's plan to redeem the world through Jesus Christ. It also opened a new era of better living in the world. The orphans, the poor, and the sick are far better cared for in Christian countries than in pagan lands. After Christianity became the religion of the Roman Empire the slaves were better treated, many of them were freed, and the brutal and bloody "games" of the gladiators were finally stopped.

When gladiators were abused, idle Romans were amused.

The story is told that as the emperor Constantine was going into battle he saw a cross of light in the sky with these words upon it: "In this sign thou shalt conquer." Constantine won the battle, and soon afterward, early in the fourth century, he issued an order saying, "We grant to the Christians and to all others free choice to follow the mode of worship they may wish." From that time, the persecution of the Christians ceased.

After it met with the favor of the emperor, Christianity spread more rapidly than ever. Great numbers of people soon



While Christianity was winning its way in the Roman Empire, the organization of the Church was developing. In the course of time, the bishops in the great cities like Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Rome came to be looked upon as the leaders in the Church. After the emperors made Christianity the religion of the empire, most of these bishops became officers of the state. They were no longer poor and persecuted, but rich and powerful.

As Christianity developed under the emperors, the authority of the Church, which formerly had rested in the hands of local or regional bishops, became more centralized. Over a period of years, the newfound wealth and popularity of Christianity brought corruption into the leadership of the Church at Rome. In an effort to further expand their power base in the world, the Church at Rome ruled that the bishop of Rome should be called the pope; and after the Western Roman Empire fell, he became the most influential person in Europe. Rome had so long been the capital of the world that it was natural for people to receive commands from it. Moreover, the missionaries sent out by the bishop of Rome had done so much to help the common man that many people from southern Europe looked up to him with affection and loyalty.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Shortly before the birth of Christ, a powerful empire developed in the city of Rome that steadily grew to dominate much of Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. For hundreds of years, the Roman armies conquered many nations and subdued many barbarian tribes. In addition, the leaders from Rome organized many building projects and created a system of roads that helped to advance commerce and unite their empire. At the height of Rome's power, around A.D. 150, it was often said, "all roads lead to Rome."



For hundreds of years, the Roman armies were able to subdue and conquer many barbarian tribes throughout much of Europe. The mighty legions, however, did not remain invincible forever.

As time went on, the Roman government and people became corrupt and immoral and began to lose control over their vast empire. Eventually, Germanic tribes called the Goths overthrew the Western Roman Empire in 476 A.D. The once proud Romans with their impressive buildings, powerful monarchs, and mighty military legions were destroyed along with the civil order that they maintained. Almost im-

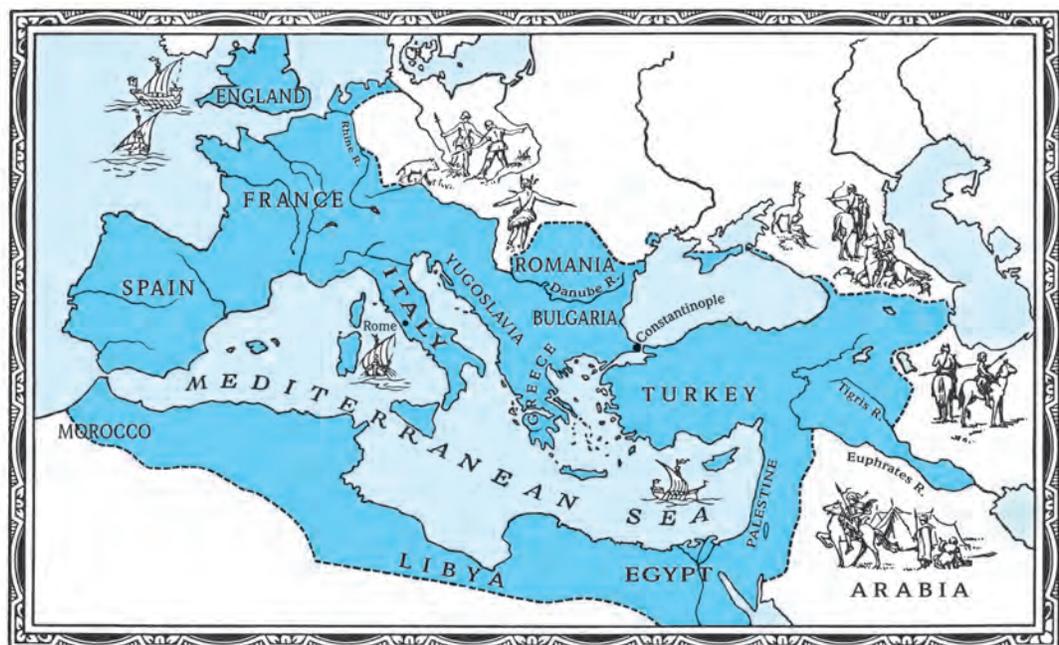


The barbarian tribes that overran Rome stole property and burned most of the city. The fall of the Roman Empire permitted the lawless barbarians to destroy much of European culture and start the period known as the Dark Ages.

mediately, chaos began to develop across much of the former Roman Empire in Western Europe. The same barbarian tribes that sacked Rome were utterly incapable of maintaining law and order. In fact, these Germanic tribes often fought with each other as the darkness of anarchy and confusion spread throughout Western Europe.

When the Roman Empire began, at the perfect time in human history, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, came to this world. Christ came to redeem all those whom the Father had given to Him, by making atonement for their sins through the shedding of His own blood on the Cross. After Christ arose bodily from the dead, He appeared many times to His followers over a space of forty days. Before Christ ascended unto Heaven, He promised that He would send God the Holy Spirit to empower His followers to take the Gospel of Christ into the entire world. This was the beginning of the Christian Church in the New Testament era.

Early on, the leaders of Rome went from ignoring Christians to persecuting them openly. Thousands of faithful and courageous Christians were murdered or harassed. As the Roman Empire began to decline, however, more and more people began to embrace the message of salvation in Christ and the Christian Church grew to the point where it was no longer an outlawed religion.



The old Roman Empire was broken up into several smaller countries. Most of these countries are still in existence today.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. How many years ago was the city of Rome founded?
2. In what year did the Roman Empire split into East and West?
3. Why did people during this time say that “all roads lead to Rome”?
4. Find out how roads were made during Roman times and compare that to the roads of today.
5. Who was the founder of the Christian Church?
6. Who was the Apostle Paul and what did he do to spread Christianity?
7. Look up some information about the famous martyr named Polycarp.
8. Did Christianity stay an outlawed religion in Rome?
9. Why did Rome grow weaker in the days of the last emperors?

KEY TERMS

Persecute

Magistrate

Barbarian

Atonement

Constantinople

Commerce

Chapter 8

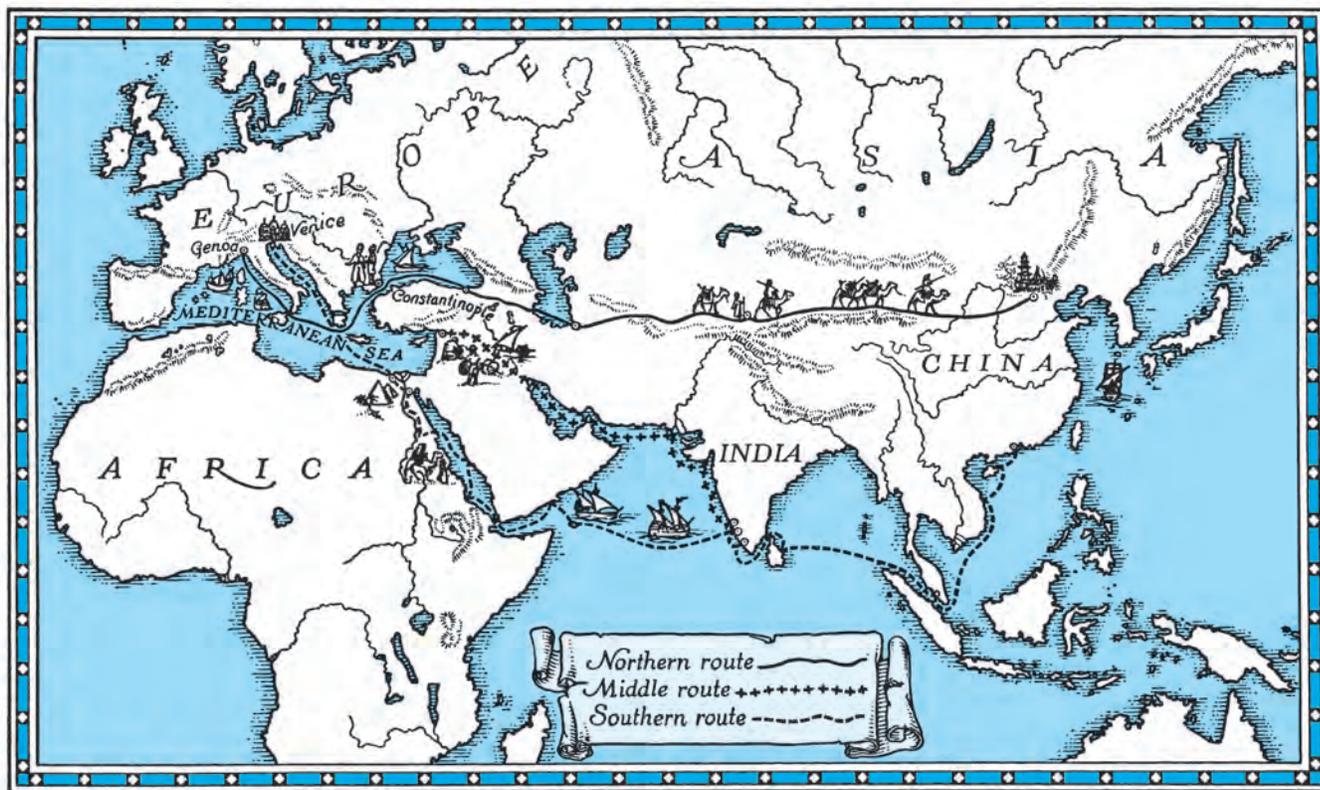
TOWN LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Europe today is crowded with towns and cities. But in the early days of the Middle Ages there were very few. What caused towns and cities to spring up throughout Europe? What were they like? What did the people who lived in these towns do?

The Growth of Towns and Cities

In the early years of the feudal system, about A.D. 900, almost the only towns in Europe were the little villages of the serfs that stood near the castles of the noblemen. The noblemen controlled these villages.

Some of the villages were located on important highways, or near shallow places in the rivers where people came to cross. To these villages came traders, who brought with them rich tapestries, cloths, rugs, spices, and other goods from the Far East.



Early trade routes between Europe and the East.

As the serfs grew larger crops, fewer people were needed for farming. This left some of the serfs free to give their time to other things. As they wanted something to exchange for the goods that traders brought,

some of them gave up farming and began to take up different kinds of work. Villages near forests soon became noted for the wooden goods their people made. Metal articles were made in the villages located near mines. In this way, manufacturing developed, and many of the villages grew into towns of size and importance. Stores were opened and shopkeepers sold goods to travelers and people of the town.

About the year 1096, at the time of the First Crusade, the people of some towns began to free themselves from the noblemen. They were not pleased to have someone outside their city make their laws.

Neither did they want to pay the high taxes which the noblemen demanded. As the towns grew larger, the townspeople learned to protect themselves against attacks, instead of taking shelter in their lords' castles. They built high, thick walls around their towns. Being independent in this way, they longed to break away entirely from the noblemen's rule.

There were several ways in which the towns won their freedom. Some towns actually fought against the nobles who were ruling them and, in that way, gained their independence. Many more, however, bought their freedom. In order to buy arms and armor and to pay his followers during a crusade, many noblemen needed much more money than they could easily raise. This money his townspeople were glad to supply on the condition that he give up his control over them. In his need for money, a noble often made promises of freedom, which he later regretted when he had returned from the Holy Land. But once the people had their freedom, they clung to it and would not give it up. In these and other ways, the noblemen—little by little—lost their control over the townspeople and the feudal system gradually died out.

Peasants who worked the land were little better than slaves. These serfs were granted a small plot of land and a pledge of protection by their local lord. In exchange for this security, the peasant serf was bound to the land with little freedom and few pleasures.



During the Middle Ages, merchants had to use donkeys and carts to transport their goods and merchandise from town to town. As years past, merchants developed a series of overland trade routes that eventually became roads that lead from city to city and from country to country.



The Towns and Cities of the Middle Ages

After they were free, many of the towns prospered. The money, which they no longer had to pay the noblemen, was now used to build better homes, finer shops, and stronger walls. In the later years of the Middle Ages, there were many thriving towns. Such cities as London, Paris, Venice, Genoa, and the Russian city of Novgorod became very important and were known throughout all of Europe. Rome, which had lost much of its importance after the fall of the Western Roman Empire, again became a leading center of civilization.

A Visit to a Town

Most of the towns and cities of Europe at this time were very similar, and a description of one will give us a picture of all of them. Let us pay a visit to a town of the Middle Ages.

As we approach the town we see first the high wall, which completely surrounds it. This is much like the wall of a castle. At the foot of the wall is a broad, deep moat like the moat around a castle. A wide drawbridge stretches across the moat and makes it easy for us to reach the gates. If, however, we were enemies, we would find the drawbridge pulled up, the heavy portcullis firmly in place, and the gates closed and bolted.

As we pass through the gates, we notice that the houses are crowded close together. They are constructed of wood and are five or six stories high, with steep, pointed roofs. On many of the houses the upper stories extend out several feet over the lower ones. The streets are so narrow that these upper stories almost meet overhead and shut out the sunlight and fresh air.

Most of the streets are muddy and unpaved, but a few are covered with cobblestones, over which horses clatter and the wooden-wheeled wagons rattle. There are no sewers, and the rainwater stands in the streets or flows in muddy streams along the wagon ruts. To our surprise, we see people throwing dishwater and scraps of food from their doors or windows into the street, with no thought of the mess they are making.

When we have carefully picked our way along the street for some distance we come to a large open square. This is the city center or marketplace. At one side of it stands a very beautiful building, the cathedral. The cathedral's towers reach high into the air and remind all visitors that the church is central to the life and culture of the entire town. For some time we stand looking in wonder at the beautifully made arches and the rich stained-glass windows. Many workmen are busy, and we find that the cathedral is not yet finished, though work on it has been going on steadily for more than two hundred years.

On the other side of the marketplace stands another large building, very different from the cathedral. It is square and made of stone and has a small and well-protected gateway. The windows are narrow slits. This building, we learn, is the citadel, the last refuge of the townspeople in case of attack. Even if the enemy succeeds in smashing their way through the walls of the town, they still have to capture the citadel before the town is theirs. So you see that the citadel served the same purpose as the keep of a castle.

Shops and Guilds

As we walk about the town, we see many shops but no large department stores like those in cities of the present day. We find that the shops of the shoemakers are grouped together on one street, the tailors' shops on another, and that each kind of business has its own section of town. Walking along the streets, we peer into many of the little shops. In one, we see men weaving rugs, tapestries, and cloth. In another, skilled artists are carving wood and ivory into beautiful and useful objects. We see a jeweler skillfully shaping silver and gold settings for precious jewels. These men have no large machines to help them. Each does his work by hand, with simple tools.

We enter the tiny shop of a shoemaker. All about us are pairs of shoes set in rows along the floor or on the workbenches. As we enter, the shoemaker himself greets us. In the back of the shop we see two young men seated on benches, cutting leather and preparing it for use in making shoes. The shoemaker tells us that these young men are learning the trade and hope someday to be shoemakers themselves. They are called *apprentices*. There are no schools to teach them how to make shoes, so they have offered their services to the shoemaker, and work for him without pay, living in his house and being treated much as though they were his sons.

The shoemaker tells us that these young men have been working for him for several years, and that soon they will no longer be apprentices. They will be given an examination in their work, and if they pass it and have money enough to start shops of their own, they will become *master workmen*. If they cannot afford shops of their own, they will continue to work for a master workman but will receive wages. Such paid workers are known as *journeymen*.

From the shoemaker, we learn that all of the industries of the Middle Ages are taught in the same way. The master workmen teach the apprentices and train them to become master workmen themselves.

The people in each line of business belong to a guild, or society, much like the labor unions or trade associations of today. The officers of the guild make rules re-



garding prices, wages, and the number of hours a man is to work each day, and see that these rules are carried out. They also give the examinations to apprentices when they feel that they are well enough trained to become master workmen.

Fairs

Most of the large towns have two or more fairs a year. Our friend the shoemaker tells us that his town is to hold a fair for a week beginning tomorrow, and he invites us to stay with him and visit the fair. This we are very glad to do.

As soon as his working day ends, the shoemaker and his apprentices lock up the shop and pass through a small door into another part of the same house, where they make their home. We follow them and are pleased to see that the shoemaker's wife is preparing dinner for us. The meal is simple but filling. There is no sugar and no pepper, though we are told that some of the wealthy people living in the nearby castle have sugar and also spices which a peddler brought from lands in the Far East to preserve their foods and make them taste better. The shoemaker's family uses honey to sweeten some of the foods, but most of the food is eaten without added flavoring. There are no forks, and we find that we are expected to use our fingers when eating. The water we drink has been carried in a wooden pail from a nearby village well. Soon after dinner, we go to bed on straw mattresses laid on the floor and pull thin woolen blankets over us.

The shoemaker wakes us an hour after daybreak, and we are soon eating our simple breakfast. Then we are off to the fair. In the marketplace, which we passed through the day before, we find a great crowd of people. Merchants have put up little wooden booths from which they sell their wares. Here we find peddlers and merchants from neighboring places as well as those from the town. Strange goods from many parts of Europe and even from the far-off lands of Asia to the east are offered for sale.

The fairs, we discover, are not only for the buying and selling of goods. There are amusements of many kinds. In one place we stop and watch a group of jugglers while they throw sharp swords high in the air and cleverly catch them by the handles as they come down. Some of the jugglers also balance poles on their noses or keep many balls in the air at one time. At another place we watch a man who has a large brown bear that he has taught to dance. The man holds a chain, which is fastened around the bear's neck, and the bear walks slowly around on its hind legs, balancing first on one foot and then on the other. Singers and musicians are everywhere to amuse the crowd and to beg for coins.

By noon the crowd has become so large that we begin to realize that not all of the buyers could have come from the town. The shoemaker tells us that farmers from miles around have come in to buy goods and to be amused by the many entertainments.

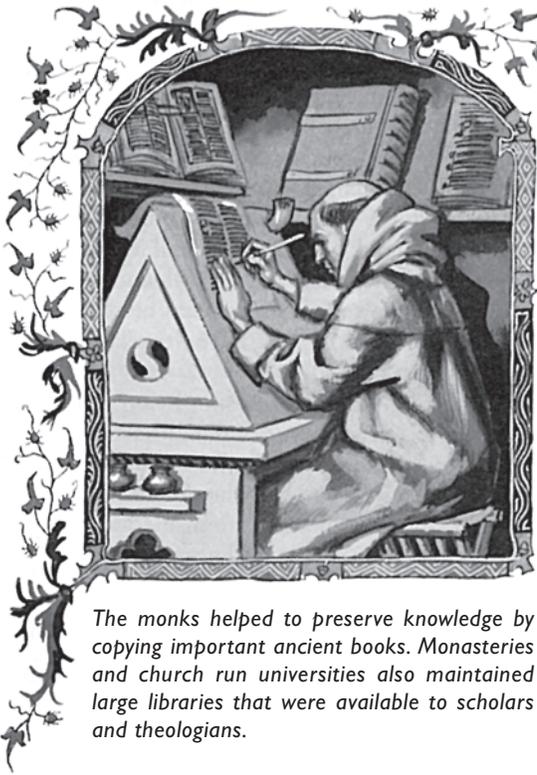
Markets

Besides its fairs, each town has a market day every week. This is like a small fair. On visiting the marketplace



Medieval fairs had thrilling sights, with dancing bears and armored knights.

on a market day, we do not find the many goods from distant lands which we noticed at the fair; nor do we see the jugglers and entertainers. The neighboring farmers and merchants are there, however, with their carts and their goods to sell, and almost all of the townspeople manage some time during the day to visit the marketplace and buy the articles they need. They can, of course, buy shoes, clothes, and the other articles sold by the storekeepers on any day during the week, but only on market day do they have a chance to buy what the farmers raise and the other goods not made in town.



The monks helped to preserve knowledge by copying important ancient books. Monasteries and church run universities also maintained large libraries that were available to scholars and theologians.

Universities

The next morning, we get ready to leave the town. Turning over the care of his shop to his apprentices, our host travels with us as far as the city gates. There we see four young men starting out on foot along the road. The shoemaker knows them, and calls them by name. We ask our host who the young men are and where they are going. He tells us that they are university students returning to their studies after a vacation. There is, he says, no university in his town, but there are a number of them scattered throughout Europe. One of the boys whom we saw leaving the town is going to study religion at the University of Paris, one of the oldest universities in the world. Another is going to the University of Salerno, in Italy, to study medicine so he can become a doctor and heal the sick. A third is going to the Italian University of Bologna to study law. The fourth is going to the University of Prague in Bohemia—a medieval

German state, now part of the Czech Republic—to learn languages and art. Some other boys from the town have already left to take up their studies at the famous universities of Oxford and Cambridge in England, and Heidelberg in Germany.

Since we seem interested, our friend the shoemaker tells us more about the European universities of that day. We learn that their students come from many parts of the world, and usually they continue to wear the clothing of their native countries. There are no girls in the universities, for women are trained in the art of homemaking; not business, law, or theology. Most of the students wear swords or daggers; and sword fights, or *duels*, are common. The classes are held in small rooms, each professor having only a few students at a time. The shoemaker says that he has heard that the boys are receiving a splendid education at their different universities, and he is sure that they are also having a good time, as life is very interesting in the big cities.

We are sorry to leave the little town of the Middle Ages and our kind host the shoemaker, but at last we start off. As we reach a bend in the road, we turn for a last look at the wall and gates of the friendly town we have visited.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In the early years of the feudal system, about A.D. 900, almost the only towns in Europe were the little villages of the serfs, which stood near the castles of the noblemen.

As trade grew up, many of the serfs gave up being farmers and began to make and sell different articles. Some of the little villages grew into towns.

About the year 1096, at the time of the First Crusade, a number of the towns began to free themselves from the noblemen who owned them. After they were free, many of the towns of the Middle Ages prospered. London, Paris, Genoa, Venice, and Novgorod were among the leading cities, and Rome once more became important.

The cities and towns of the Middle Ages were usually surrounded by walls and protected by moats. Drawbridges, heavy gates, and portcullises helped to keep the enemy out of a city in case of attack.

The houses in the towns of the Middle Ages were made of wood and were crowded close together. Often the upper stories extended out over the streets. The streets were mostly unpaved and there were no sewers to carry off rainwater. Dishwater and scraps of food were dumped in the streets and left there to rot where they often spread germs or disease.

A town of the Middle Ages usually had a large open square known as the city center or marketplace. In the center of town was the cathedral, which symbolized the centrality of the church, and also the citadel—the last refuge of the townspeople in case of attack.

There were many small shops but no large department stores. Shops of the same kind were grouped together on the same street. The shopkeepers had their homes in the same buildings as their shops.

During the Middle Ages there were no schools to teach trades. Boys who wished to learn a trade worked for a master workman without pay for several years. During this time, they were known as apprentices. When they had learned their trade, the apprentices were given an examination; and, if their work was good enough, they were allowed to set up shops of their own. If they did not have money enough to set up their own shops, they continued to work for master workmen. They were then called journeymen and received wages for their work.

The people in each line of work belonged to a guild, or society. The officers of these guilds made and enforced rules that governed all of their workmen.

Each town held two or more fairs a year. Merchants came from far and near to sell their goods, and there were many entertainers. All of the townspeople and farmers for miles around came to buy goods or to be amused.

Once every week, each town had a market day when nearby merchants and farmers brought their goods to be sold in the marketplace.

Many universities were started in Europe during the Middle Ages. Among the important ones were the University of Paris, the University of Salerno, the University of Bologna, the University of Prague, Oxford University, Cambridge University, and the University of Heidelberg. Students came to these universities from many countries.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. When did towns and cities begin to spring up in Europe? Why did some of them become important?
2. How did the towns of the Middle Ages free themselves from the noblemen?
3. Name several important cities of the Middle Ages.
4. How were the towns of the Middle Ages protected?
5. In what kind of houses did the townspeople of the Middle Ages live?
6. Why did towns often have a citadel?
7. Why were churches or cathedrals normally built in the center of town?
8. Describe the shops of the Middle Ages.
9. Imagine that you are a master workman. How did you learn your trade?
10. Of what use were the guilds?
11. Imagine that you have visited a fair of the Middle Ages. Tell about it.
12. What happened once a week in the marketplace?
13. Name two universities in Europe during the Middle Ages.

KEY TERMS

Tapestries	Guild
Citadel	Merchant
Apprentice	Journeyman