



# How the Feudal System Worked in Medieval Times

KS3 Ages 11-14 ⌚ 3 min read

## What Was the Feudal System?

In **medieval times** (roughly **1000 to 1500 AD**), most people in **Europe** lived under a system called **feudalism**. This was like a giant network of promises and trades. Instead of using money, people exchanged work and loyalty for land and protection. At the top was the **King**, and below him came **nobles** and **lords** who owned most of the land.

Think of it like a football team: the manager makes the big decisions, team captains organize smaller groups, and players follow the rules in exchange for being part of the team and getting paid.

## The Four Levels of Medieval Society

**Kings** ruled entire countries and owned the most land. They gave large pieces of land called **fiefs** to **nobles** and **bishops** (church leaders) in exchange for loyalty and military help. These nobles promised to fight for the king if needed.

**Lords** were next in the chain. They managed smaller areas of land and had their own soldiers. In return for land from the nobles above them, they promised loyalty and military service.

**Knights** were trained soldiers who served lords. They received land and protection in exchange for fighting and keeping the peace. Knights followed a strict code of honour called **chivalry**.

At the bottom were **peasants** and **serfs**. Most were **unfree** – they couldn't leave the land they worked on without permission. They farmed the lord's fields, paid taxes (usually in crops, not coins), and received protection in return.

Think of it like a pyramid: the king sits at the top making decisions, nobles support him from below, knights protect everyone, and peasants form the strong base that feeds everyone.

## How Did It Actually Work?

Peasants would work on a lord's land, usually a farm or **manor**. They grew food for themselves and gave some to the lord. In dangerous times, they could shelter in the lord's castle. The lord promised to protect them and provide justice if someone stole from them.

Lords promised **homage** (loyalty and respect) to their noble overlords. They swore solemn oaths and sometimes knelt before them. Breaking these promises was considered extremely shameful and could lead to loss of land and title.

This system lasted for hundreds of years because it provided order and security. Everyone knew their place and what was expected. However, it also meant most people had very little freedom – peasants couldn't travel, choose their job, or own property. The system only began to break down when towns grew, trade increased, and people discovered they could use money instead.