THE DECLINE OF FEUDALISM

Chapter 5
Three Causes For the Breakdown of Feudalism:

• Political changes in England:
  – Magna Carta (a document that limited the king's power & strengthened the rights of nobles)

• Bubonic Plague ("Black Death"):
  – Killed millions of people in Europe, which led to economic & social changes

• Hundred Years’ War:
  – Between 1337 and 1453; France & England fought series of wars – this changed the way wars were fought & shifted the power from feudal lords to monarchs
Political Developments in England (5.2)

• There were many reasons for the decline of feudalism in Europe. In England, political developments helped to weaken feudalism. Henry II began this process.

• HENRY II’S LEGAL REFORM: King Henry insisted a jury formally accuse a person of a crime. Cases were then tried by a royal judge. Trials by judges and juries replaced trial by ordeal and combat.

• CONSTITUTION OF CLARENDON: A document issued by Henry II that spelled out the king’s traditional rights. They included the right to try clergy accused of serious crimes in royal courts (rather than church courts).

• These actions caused a bitter battle between Henry and his friend, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket.
  — In 1170, four knights killed Becket in front of the alter at the Canterbury Cathedral. This became a popular pilgrimage site, and in 1173 Becket was proclaimed a saint.
POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS (5.2 cont’d)

• King John and the Magna Carta: King John, Henry’s youngest son, made enemies by losing most of the English-controlled land to France. He taxed his barons heavily and ignored their rights. He arrested opponents at will. He quarreled with the church and collected money from its properties.
• June 1215: angry barons forced King John to meet with them and put his seal on the Magna Carta.
• MAGNA CARTA: an agreement between the barons and the king.
  – King John could continue his rule, but he had to agree to observe common law and traditional rights of barons and the church.
  – He had to consult both barons and the church before imposing special taxes. He agreed that no free man could be jailed except by lawful judgment of peers or by the law of the land.
  – This became the basis of HABEAS CORPUS (accused persons can’t be held in jail without consent of the court)
THE MAGNA CARTA (5.2 cont’d)

- Protected the rights and privileges of nobles
- It took on a much broader meaning as people in England came to regard it as one of the foundations of their rights and liberties.
King Edward I and the Model Parliament (5.2)

• 1295: King John’s grandson, Edward I called together a governing body called a Model Parliament.

• It included commoners (people who are not of noble rank) and lower-ranking clergy, as well as church officials and nobles.
The Impact of Political Developments in England

(5.2)

• The political developments contributed to feudalism's decline in two ways: (1) Some strengthened royal authority at the expense of nobles, and (2) others weakened feudalism by shifting power to common people.

• Magna Carta established rights and liberties that even the king couldn't violate.

• It also affirmed that monarchs should rule with the advice of the governed.

• Henry II's legal reforms strengthened English common law and the role of judges and juries.

• Edward I's Model Parliament gave common people a voice in government. All these ideas gave way to modern democratic institutions.
QUESTIONS

① How did Henry II improve English law?

② What changes did the Magna Carta bring about in English government?

③ What was the Model Parliament, and why was it created?

④ How did these political developments in England contribute to the decline of Feudalism?
THE BUBONIC PLAGUE (5.3)

• First struck Europe from 1347 to 1351. It returned about every decade into the 15th century. It left major changes in its wake.

• Historians believe the plague began in central Asia, traveled throughout Asia to the Black Sea along the Silk Road (main trade route between east and west), and to Italy probably on a ship. It then spread north and west throughout Europe and England.
The Black Death (5.3 cont’d)

• Symptoms of the plague: fever, vomiting, fierce coughing and sneezing fits, and egg-sized bumps on the body. The name Black Death referred to the black and blue blotches appearing on victims.

• The plague probably spread in this way (dirty conditions everywhere):

  Bacteria of dead animals ➔ eaten by fleas ➔ landed on animals/people

*No one really knew where the disease came from or how it spread. People blamed it on planet position, lepers, or Jews.

*Persecution of Jews didn’t begin with the plague, but fear of the plague made things worse. During the Black Death, many German cities ordered Jews to leave.
Impact of the Plague (5.3 cont’d)

- China’s population was reduced by nearly half between 1200 and 1393, probably because of plague and famine.
- 24 million Europeans died as a result of the plague. The deaths of so many caused changes in economic and social structure in Europe that contributed to the decline of feudalism.
- Trade and commerce slowed to almost half. After the economy began to recover, feudal lords lost most of the power.
- After the plague, there was a shift of power from nobles to common people. The need for workers was high, but there weren’t many workers because of death. Many serfs left manors, leaving the manor system weak and a loss of power for feudal lords.
- Many peasant revolts happened in France, Flanders, England, Germany, Spain, and Italy. The English Peasants’ War in 1381 caused the revolt leader’s death, but caused the beginning of the end of serfdom.
5.3 QUESTIONS

1. What areas of the world were affected by the spread of the plague in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century?

2. Why was the plague called the Black Death?

3. How was the plague spread?

4. How did the outbreak of plague in the 14\textsuperscript{th} century contribute to the decline of feudalism in Europe?
THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR (5.4)

• A series of wars over the control of lands in France, fought between England and France, between 1337 and 1453.
• English kings claimed lands in France as their own fiefs. French kings disputed these claims. When Philip VI of France declared that the French fiefs of King Edward III’s fiefs were part of his own realm, war broke out.
• The English, often outnumbered, won most of the early battles of the war.
• BATTLE OF CRECEY: The French feudal army relied on horse-mounted nobles (knights) that wore heavy armor and could hardly move. Their weapons were swords and lances. The foot soldiers used crossbows (medieval weapon made up of a bow across a wooden stock, operated by a trigger), only effective from short distances.
• English longbows, lightly armored knights, and foot soldiers gave England’s army an advantage. The longbow shot long distances with great accuracy. This helped the English defeat the much larger French army.
The French Fight Back (5.4 cont’d)

- In 1415, after a long truce, Henry V again invaded France. This time, the English were met with stronger resistance and modern tactics used by the French army (made up of commoners paid by tax money like the English army).

- Another reason for better French resistance was 17-year-old peasant girl, Joan of Arc. She put on armor and fought, leading a French army to victory in the Battle of Orleans.

- The English accused Joan of being a witch and a heretic (a person who holds contrary beliefs from the church’s teachings). This caused a feeling of national unity and unity in France. 22 years after Joan’s death, the French finally drove the English out of their country. Joan was made a saint almost 500 years later by the Roman Catholic Church.
The Impact of the Hundred Years’ War (5.4 cont’d)

- The Hundred Year’s War helped shift power from the feudal lords to monarchs and common people, which contributed to the decline of feudalism.
- Monarchs collected taxes and raised professional armies, so they no longer needed nobles to supply knights for the armies.
- Changes in technology meant nobles’ knights and castles were less useful. Armies learned to use gunpowder to shoot iron balls from cannons and blast holes in castle walls.
- New feelings of nationalism also shifted power away from lords. The war created a new sense of national unity and patriotism on both sides.
- In both France and England, peasants were forced to fight in the army and pay higher and more frequent taxes. Those who survived the war were needed as soldiers and workers. For this reason, common people emerged from the fighting with greater influence and power.
5.4 QUESTIONS

1. How did the Hundred Years’ War start?

2. Why were the English able to defeat the French in early battles, such as the one at Crecy?

3. Who was Joan of Arc? What did she do for the French during the Hundred Years’ War?

4. How did the war contribute to the decline of feudalism?
CHAPTER 5 SUMMARY (5.5)

• THREE KEY EVENTS CONTRIBUTED TO THE DECLINE OF FEUDALISM:

  — Political developments in England helped shift power to the king and common people.
  — After the bubonic plague, the need for workers to rebuild Europe led to a shift in power from feudal lords to the common people.
  — The Hundred Years’ War brought a rise in national feeling in both England and France. It also reduced the importance of nobles and knights on the battlefield.