Feudalism one of the results of the barbaric disruption of the Roman Empire: Roman aristocracy replaced by Germanic aristocracy. Roman institutions and customs replaced or transformed by those of the invaders.

Social and economic transformation of Western Europe: wealth in land concentrated in hands of few who formed the governing class which became hereditary. Majority of population depressed into serfs or dependents. As empire crumbled people gathered around the strong castles that could afford some protection. Law and order, travel and commerce broke down. Each castle had to be able to defend itself and had to be self-sufficient.

Feudalism in France: Gregory of Tours in his History of the Franks set forth the philosophy of history that no Arian barbarians set up a lasting kingdom. Only the Franks who became Catholic Christians set up a lasting kingdom. The growth of feudalism was encouraged by the practice of the Frankish kings of spending a lifetime fighting to unite the many branches of the Franks and then dividing the kingdom among their sons in their will.

As the Merovingian kings degenerated the mayors of the palace became the chief representatives of the new Germanic aristocracy. Bishops and abbots shared in this aristocracy—no church or monastery was any safer than its castle and its power to defend itself against the greedy secular aristocracy. The wealthy, landed, semi-independent aristocracy sapped the strength of the monarchy until the Carolingian mayors of the palace were able to replace the Merovingian "do-nothing" kings.

Three practices that characterized and promoted feudalism:

1. Commendation: the relation of the citizen of the state was replaced by the dependent personal and economic relationship between private individuals— the serf or vassal to the lord of the castle. The poor, weak, debt-ridden free man commended himself to a great landowner and became his vassal. In return for protection he owed the lord civil and military service.

2. Benefice: The small landowner turned his land over to the powerful lord on condition that he could remain on it. A "benefice" was the gift of the use of the land from the title holder. The powerful lords reduced the holders of benefices to a servile condition. Charles Martel confiscated church lands to grant as benefices to men who had served in his army against the Moslems at Tours in 732.

3. Immunity: The large land holders forced the king to grant them exclusive jurisdiction. Efficient royal administration became impossible. The Merovingian kings granted immunity to ecclesiastics—no civil judge could hear cases where immunity was granted. Power slipped from the monarch to private persons. The decentralization of feudalism was temporarily checked by the Carolingians.
The Rise of Charlemagne: Charlemagne was the son of Pepin the Short, the first of the Carolingian kings. Pepin was the son of Charles Martel who defeated the Moslems at Tours in 732. Pepin was mayor of the palace under Childeric III, the last of the Merovingian kings. With the blessings of the missionary Boniface and Pope Zacharias, Pepin shaved the head of Childeric and put him in a monastery. The Frankish nobles recognized Pepin as king at Soissons 751/752. When Pope Stephen III escaped from Aistulf, the Lombard, and fled to Pepin begging for help against the Lombards, Pope Stephen anointed Pepin King of the Franks. Pepin held the pope's horse. Pepin twice defeated the Lombards and laid the keys to the Lombard cities on the tomb of Peter.

The Donation of Pepin made the papal states one of the largest in Europe. Pepin with the help of Boniface reformed the Frankish church which had not held a synod for eighty years. A monk Chrodegang reformed the Frankish monasteries and gave them a new rule. At Pepin's death in 768 his kingdom was divided between his two sons, Carloman and Charles. At Carloman's death in 771 Charles took control of the united Frankish kingdom. In 768 Charles had married the daughter of Desiderius, the Lombard king, to the great displeasure of Pope Stephen IV. At Carloman's death his wife with her sons fled to the Lombards for refuge. Charles sent his Lombard wife back to her father which greatly pleased Pope Hadrian I but which brought war with the Lombards. Charles defeated the Lombards. The Lombards attacked Rome in 774 and Charles dethroned Desiderius and became King of the Lombards as well as of the Franks. Charles was welcomed to Rome where he renewed the Donation of Pepin.

The Wars of Charlemagne: During his reign Charles led 54 campaigns: 5 against the Lombards, 18 against the Saxons, 3 against the Frisians and Danes, 1 against Thuringia, 1 against Bavaria, 4 against the Avars, 4 against the Slavs, 5 against the Moslems, 2 against the Byzantines, and 2 against the Bretons. His chronicler commented on 790: "This year was without war." The victories greatly enlarged his kingdom, brought wealth and fame a gave him the name "Charlemagne." Conquered neighboring kingdoms were expected to become Christian. To become Christian came to mean submission to the Franks and the loss of freedom.

Charles and the Saxons: The fiercest and most prolonged of Charlemagne's wars were the 18 campaigns against the Saxons. Imperialism and religion were one to Charlemagne's mind. Christianity was not optional--it was the only religion for his empire. He was determined to incorporate Saxony into his kingdom and to make Christians of the Saxons. To the Saxons Christianity was synonymous with submission to Charlemagne and the loss of freedom. Alcuin of York, Charlemagne's counselor and teacher, urged him to send missionaries to the Saxons rather than soldiers. But when the Saxons killed the missionaries and burned churches and refused Christianity, Charlemagne in 772 determined to use force. It took him thirty years to conquer the Saxons. The most famous of the Saxon leaders was Widukind. Charlemagne gave conquered Saxons the choice of baptism or death. Also he decreed death for failing to tithe or for eating meat during Lent. At Verden 4,500 Saxons chose to be beheaded rather than be baptized. Alcuin plead for preaching "the easy yoke of Christ" instead of trying to enforce tithing and Lent.

Ludger the great apostle to Saxony: Ludger, a Frisian who had studied under Boniface and under Alcuin; after being ordained a priest in 778 at age of 30 he worked zealously and with great success among the Saxons. He founded a monastery at Werden. He died in 809 as the venerated bishop of Munster.
Charlemagne as emperor of the Holy Roman Empire: Pope Leo III was kidnapped by ruffians employed by Roman nobles and imprisoned. They planned to blind him and cut out his tongue. The pope escaped to Charlemagne. The pope's enemies presented Charlemagne with a long list of charges against the pope. Charlemagne ordered an investigation. Pope Leo III declared that the pope has the right to judge everyone but can be judged by no one. Before a conclave of dignitaries in St. Peter's the pope placed his hands on the gospels and swore that he was innocent of all the charges. The congregation broke into praise to God, the Virgin Mary, and apostles and saints. Two days later, on Christmas Day, 800 A.D., while Charlemagne was kneeling at the altar of St. Peter's, surrounded by the nobility of the Franks and of Italy, Pope Leo III, without warning, placed the imperial crown on the head of Charlemagne and declared him emperor. The crowd shouted: "To Charles Augustus, crowned by God, great and peaceful emperor of the Romans, long life and victory." Thus was inaugurated the Holy Roman Empire. Charles protested and declared that if he had known what was going to happen he would not have entered the church. He took the emperorship seriously. Charlemagne regarded the pope as one of his subjects, maintaining he had rescued the pope from his enemies. The pope maintained that he was supreme on earth and would have to answer for Charlemagne's soul. Charlemagne strongly rebuked and admonished the pope for worldliness and urged him to care for the spiritual affairs while the emperor took care of temporal affairs. It was the beginning of the long Investiture Controversy. The emperor claimed the right to bestow the ring and staff—the symbols of spiritual office—on bishops in his empire. The pope maintained that only the pope could bestow the ring and staff.

Charlemagne and the Church: Charlemagne took great interest in every aspect of the life of the church.

1. The doctrine of the church: Charlemagne tried to inform himself on all the doctrinal issues of the day. A number of famous Frankish councils during his reign dealt with the live issues of the day. Councils at Ratisbon (792), Regensburg (794), Frankfort (794), Aachen (799-800) dealt with the Adoptionist Controversy imported from Spain. Charlemagne instructed his theologians to give special attention at the Council of Frankfort (794) to the results of the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II of 787) concerning the Iconoclastic Controversy. Charlemagne condemned the Seventh Council and ordered the images removed from Frankish churches. The Council of Aachen dealt with the "filoque" controversy, giving approval to the "filoque."

2. The discipline of the church: Charlemagne required 33 councils to give attention to improving discipline in the Frankish churches. Careful attention was given to the management of church lands, use of church wealth to care for the poor, and the life and work of the priests. Bishops were required to carefully supervise the clergy. Clerical clothes and short hair distinguished clergy.

3. Reformation and revival of monasticism: Charlemagne enforced the rule of Chrodegang. He allowed Benedict of Aniane to resign from the army to push the reform. Benedice founded Languedoc.

4. Ecclesiastical buildings: Charlemagne spent great sums building and beautifying churches and establishing monasteries. He wanted relics in every church.

5. Reforms in worship: He encouraged good preaching and the Gregorian chant. He brought music teachers from Rome. He had a beautiful organ constructed for the cathedral at Aachen. Baptistry began to give way to the font and immersion was replaced by pouring. Public penance disappeared. Private masses for the dead became popular. Unleavened bread used in Eucharist despite protests of East and wine taken through a straw.
Charlemagne and education: Charlemagne put great emphasis on education. He gathered scholars at his court: Alcuin of York, Paul the Deacon (a Lombard), Theodulf the Goth, Angilbert the Frank, Peter of Pisa, Paulinus of Aquitaine, Einhard (a Frank and the biographer of Charlemagne). Charlemagne insisted on education for his children and grandchildren. He took great interest in the discussions of his scholars. He learned to read Latin but made little progress in writing. He insisted that churches and monasteries be centers of learning and made bishops and priests responsible for the education of the people. The Carolingian Renaissance was one of the bright spots of the Middle Ages and continued while the empire and kingdom of the Franks was decaying.

Charlemagne and the missionaries: Gave great encouragement and support to missionaries. Sent many to Saxons--most famous was Ludger.

Charlemagne's family: many wives and concubines. Wanted many grandchildren but did not want sons-in-laws. Very devoted to his children and grandchildren. After giving life to building a united kingdom and empire willed it to his numerous descendants, bringing back the growth of feudalism. His gains would be lost in internecine struggles. In 813, before his death in 814, Charlemagne had his son, Louis the Pious, crown himself in the church at Aachen so that the pope could not claim that he had made him emperor.

Charlemagne and the Danes: Three Norman pirate ships appeared off the coast of Neustria while Charlemagne was visiting there. He wept over what these Northmen would do to his descendants.

Charlemagne as a man: He captured the hearts of his people and the imagination of succeeding ages as few men have done. He was an impressive figure. He could out run, out wrestle, out jump, out swim, and out fight his men. He was temperate in drink but ate much roast beef. He loved his afternoon nap. He failed to develop an effective and efficient tax system. He did not develop an efficient administration so that many evils existed beyond his vision. He had a great concern for justice and the welfare of his people. He was the ally of the pope but did not want the pope meddling in France. His vision of uniting East and West collapsed when he condemned the Seventh Ecumenical Council. Plans for his marriage to the Empress Irene and the marriage of his daughter, Rotade, to the son of Irene, Emperor Constantine VI, were broken off and Charlemagne strongly denounced the East.