CHAPTER SUMMARY

The fourteenth century was a time of disease, war, crime, violence, and ethnic-racial conflicts. The art and literature of the period are full of the portrayal of death, just as the historical accounts are full of tales of conflict and violence. There were several major causes for this century of human suffering. Natural disaster—including changes in climate and horrible new diseases—attacked Europe. A long series of wars between France and England not only brought death and economic ruin but increased personal violence and crime as well. In addition, a serious shortage of labor, created by the bubonic plague, resulted in intense social conflict among landlords. Economic crisis during the century also resulted in a bitter struggle between urban workers and their guild masters.

Amid such violence the church lost power and prestige, partly because of the religious disillusionment that accompanied the plague. In short, the institutional church failed to fill the spiritual vacuum left by the series of disasters. A more immediate reason for the decline of the church’s influence and prestige was the Babylonian Captivity and the Great Schism. The call for reform, often in the form of the conciliar movement, by people such as Marsiglio of Padua and John Wyclif, was a signal of things to come in the sixteenth century. The disillusionment with the organized church also led to greater lay independence and, ultimately, ideas of social and political equality. The wars actually fostered the development of constitutionalism in England.

But the century of disaster was also a century of change, some of it for the good of ordinary people. It is in this light that the chapter examines some important changes in marriage practices, family relations, and the life of the people. The decline in population meant that those who survived had better food and higher wages. Peasants in Western Europe used the labor-shortage problem to demand higher wages and freedom from serfdom. Meanwhile, landlords tried to shift the cost of war and the increase in expenses to their peasants. These circumstances often resulted in conflict with their lords.

The migrations of peoples from European heartland to the frontier regions of Ireland, the Baltic, Eastern Europe, and Spain led to ethnic frictions between native peoples and new settlers. Economic difficulties led to ethnic consciousness and spawned vicious racism.

SECTION 1 – PRELUDE TO DISASTER

1. What were the causes and consequences of the population decline that began in the early fourteenth century?

Important terms:
Little Ice Age
Great Famine
SECTION 2 – THE BLACK DEATH
1. What was the source of the bubonic plague and why did it spread so rapidly in Europe?
2. What impact did the plague have on wages and the demand for labor? What happened to land values?
3. Describe the psychological effects of the plague. How did people explain this disaster?

Important terms:
Pasteurella pestis
Giovanni Boccaccio
English Statute of Laborers
Flagellants

SECTION 3 – THE HUNDRED YEARS’ WAR (1337-1453)
1. What were the immediate causes of the Hundred Years’ War?
2. Why did the people support their kings during this war?
3. What were the results of the Hundred Years’ War? Who were the winners and losers within both countries?

Important terms:
Queen Isabella
Edward III
Philip VI
Edward the Black Prince
Battle of Crecy
Poitiers
Agincourt
Joan of Arc
Communes

SECTION 4 – CHALLENGES TO THE CHURCH
1. How did the Babylonian Captivity weaken the power and prestige of the church? Why were there three popes in 1409?
2. What was the Conciliar movement and who were its advocates? Was this a revolutionary idea? Explain.
3. Why was Wyclif a threat to the institutional church?

Important terms:
The Great Schism
Conciliarists
Marsiglio of Padua
Lollards

INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIETY – JAN HUS
1. Since Jan Hus lived and died insisting that his religious teaching was thoroughly orthodox, why has he been hailed as a reformer?
2. What political and cultural interests did the martyred Hus serve?

SECTION 5 – ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHANGE
1. Did peasants’ lives improve or deteriorate in the 14th and 15th centuries? In what ways?
2. Why did a great amount of conflict and frustration among guild members develop in the 14th century?
3. What was fur-collar crime and why did it occur?
4. What were the reasons for the French of 1358 and the English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381?

Important terms:
merchet
Banns
Robin Hood
Jacquerie
ciompi
Dolimit Chronicle
Statute of Kilkenny
Geoffrey Chaucer
Francois Villon
Dante Alighieri

LISTENING TO THE PAST – CHRISTINE DE PISAN
1. How did Christine think courtly women should behave around men?