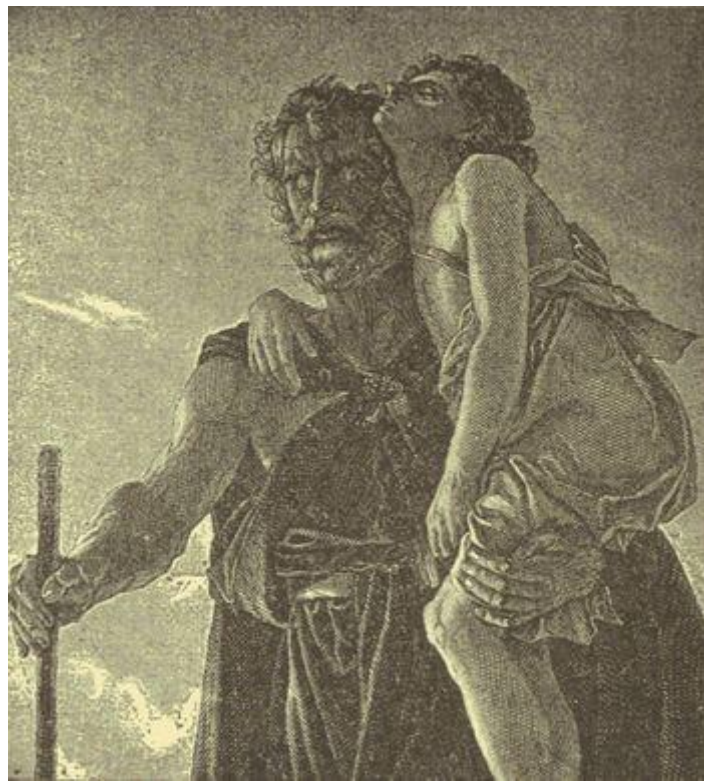


# BELISARIUS



**BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK  
FOR GRADES 7-12**

**BELISARIUS**  
(505-565 C.E.)

Few men have performed greater achievements than this general, to whom it was given to be conqueror again and again over nations hitherto invincible, and to arrest, during his own lifetime, the disintegration of the Roman Empire. He lived in the early part of the sixth century of the Christian era, though the date of his birth is not certainly known, and he was in the prime of life about 530. Belisarius is believed to have been the son of a peasant of Thrace, probably of Slavonian descent, as his name, stripped of its classical form, would belong to that language and would be *Beli-than*, or *the White Prince*.

1. Describe Belisarius' father.

---

---

---

---

---

---

Apparently he began life as a common soldier, and gradually rose by courage and ability. His master, the

Emperor Justinian, was an equally remarkable personage, capable of conceiving and accomplishing magnificent designs, yet withal of a mean, ungenerous, ungrateful character. Justinian was responsible for the codification (under Christianized conditions) of the old Roman law (known as the Justinian Code), so as to serve as the foundation of jurisprudence to all the European nations except the English; the building of the church of St. Sophia (Hagia Sophia); and the rolling back for a time the flood that on all sides was overwhelming the ancient Empire of Rome, were all due to this prince.

2. Who ruled as emperor of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire during the life of Belisarius?

---

---

---

For the last two centuries, the Eastern and the Western Roman empires had been separated, though sometimes coalescing under one head.

## Belisarius

But in 476 C.E., the last titular Emperor of the West had been deposed (Romulus Augustus at the hands of the barbarian Odoacer). Italy had been the prey of successive swarms of Teutonic (Germanic) nations. Vandals and Ostrogoths (or Eastern Goths) had burst upon Rome. While the Vandals proceeded to devastate the great Roman province of Northern Africa and set up a kingdom there, the Goths had established another in Italy.

3. Who deposed Romulus Augustus in 476 CE?

---

---

---

---

Constantinople still held its ground as the magnificent capital of the Eastern Empire, maintaining the old civilization. But its dominions were threatened by the vigorous Persians on the east, and on the north by the Bulgarians, a nation chiefly Slavonic and very savage and formidable.

4. What city served as the capital of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire?

---

---

---

---

This was the inheritance to which Justinian succeeded, in right of his uncle Justin, a successful soldier. He was forty-five years old at the time, in 527 C.E., having had an entirely civil and literary training. And though warfare continued through the thirty-eight years of his reign, he never once appeared at the head of his armies. Yet his foresight and ambition were great, and he had not long been on the throne before he decided on an endeavor to recover the African provinces.

5. Do you believe that a solely civil and literary education is adequate for a future emperor? Why or why not?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Belisarius

The Vandals were Arian heretics, denying the Godhead and Eternity of the Christian God. They had cruelly persecuted and constantly oppressed the Catholics, who entreated the Eastern Empire to deliver them, so that religious zeal added strength to Justinian's ambition. The luxuries of Carthage and the other African cities had in a couple of generations done much to destroy the vigor of the Vandals, so that the conjuncture was favorable.

6. What religious sect (of which the Vandals were part) was considered heretical?

---

---

---

Belisarius had proved his abilities in a dangerous retreat in the Persian war, but he probably owed his appointment to the African expedition to his wife Antonina. Antonina was the daughter of a charioteer in the exhibitions of the hippodrome, which were loved to a passionate, almost incredible degree, by the people of the Eastern cities. Theodora, the wife of the emperor, was likewise the child of one of these competitors in the races. Both ladies were devotedly loved by their husbands, and it was thus that Belisarius obtained the opportunity for his career, a curious parallel in

this, as in other respects, to the great English Duke of Marlborough.

7. Name Belisarius' wife.

---

---

8. Name Justinian's wife.

---

---

Belisarius only took on this expedition 10,000 foot and 6,000 horse, picked men, with carefully selected officers, bred in the old Roman discipline, for he much preferred a small army whom he could trust, to a large and unwieldy host. His fleet amounted to 500 vessels of different sizes.

The expedition sailed from Heraclea in June, 533, and one of the first acts of the general showed his sternness of discipline. A murder was committed in a drunken fit by two Huns, and he immediately hung them both. Belisarius silenced the murmurs of the rest by a speech in which he declared that Roman arms must be carried in pure hands, and that no courage would obtain pardon for violence or insubordination.

9. From where did Belisarius' expedition sail in June of 533 CE?

---

---

**Vocabulary Terms:** Match each vocabulary term (found in the text above) with its definition.

10. \_\_\_\_ a distinguished or important person
11. \_\_\_\_ a professed believer whose religious opinions differ from those of his or her church
12. \_\_\_\_ act or process of arranging in a systematic form
13. \_\_\_\_ active, robust, and strong
14. \_\_\_\_ beseeched or implored
15. \_\_\_\_ condition or quality of being defiant to authority
16. \_\_\_\_ incapable of being defeated
17. \_\_\_\_ the act or process of deteriorating or breaking up
18. \_\_\_\_ the philosophy or science of law
19. \_\_\_\_ to grow into one body
20. \_\_\_\_ to make an effort or strive
21. \_\_\_\_ to render desolate

**Terms**

- |                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| (A) coalesce       | (G) heretic         |
| (B) codification   | (H) insubordination |
| (C) devastate      | (I) invincible      |
| (D) disintegration | (J) jurisprudence   |
| (E) endeavor       | (K) personage       |
| (F) entreated      | (L) vigorous        |

Belisarius landed in September at Caput Vadas, five days' distance from Carthage, without opposition and with an eager welcome from the natives. The natives rejoiced to be delivered from the Vandal oppression, and Belisarius preserved their goodwill by hindering his soldiers from committing any act of plunder or

violence. Indeed Gelimer, king of the Vandal horde, was only like an enemy occupying the place. There had been no amalgamation, and persecution had sown seeds of bitter hatred. Gelimer, however, marched out to meet the invaders, and at ten miles from Carthage was totally defeated, and his brother and nephew killed.

22. Who was king of the Vandals at this time?

---

---

---

Gelimer fled into the deserts of Numidia, recalling his brother who was putting down a revolt in Sardinia, and leaving the city to Belisarius, who entered on the feast of the great Carthaginian martyr, St. Cyprian, amid the extreme joy of the populace. When the brother of Gelimer returned from Sardinia there was still another battle to fight, but as usual Belisarius conquered. Gelimer submitted and received an estate in Galatia, and lived there in honor and prosperity for the rest of his days. The bravest of his warriors took service in the Roman army under their victor. Gelimer had, however, first to march in the triumph of Belisarius, the only one ever held at Constantinople.

23. To where did Gelimer retire?

---

---

---

Justinian had recalled the general, though it would have been far wiser to have left him to consolidate his conquest. But no Roman emperor could be free from the suspicion that a victorious general might become his

rival, nor could the scrupulous loyalty of Belisarius disarm him. It is said that Gelimer marched along, repeating, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

The next scheme of Justinian was the recovery of Italy from the Goths. This people had never shown the same savage cruelty as the Vandals, but had settled amicably among the Italians, and adopted much of their civilization and learning. They had recently had a truly great monarch, Theodoric, who deserves to rank with Alfred or Charlemagne, but he had left only a daughter, Amalasantia, a noble woman, and an ally of Justinian.

Amalasantia was stifled in her bath by Theodatus, the husband whom she had raised to the throne. The Gothic kingdom was convulsed by the crime, and Justinian saw both motive and opportunity for conquest. Yet he only gave Belisarius 4,500 horse and 3,000 infantry when this great enterprise was begun in 535, besides some choice troops of the imperial guard.

24. How was Amalasantia killed?

---

---

---

Sailing to Sicily, Belisarius met no resistance except at Panormis

## Belisarius

(Palermo). But observing that his masts overtopped the walls, Belisarius hung up small rafts full of archers, whose arrows disconcerted the inhabitants so that they surrendered, and the whole island was restored to the Roman power. Theodatus tried to treat with Justinian, and while the negotiations were going on, Belisarius crossed over to the African province, which was threatened by the Moors of Mount Atlas. Strong measures were needed, but for the time the incursions were repressed. And by the time the bad faith of Theodatus had disgusted the Greeks, Belisarius was ready to cross into Italy and besiege Naples. As usual, the native inhabitants were his friends, but were in terror of the Gothic garrison, and these, on their side, were afraid of treating with the Greek general because Theodatus had their wives and children as hostages.

25. Why was the Gothic garrison afraid of Theodatus?

---

---

---

Theodatus, however, shut himself up in Rome and gave no aid to Naples. Belisarius had made up his mind to raise the siege and attack Rome itself, when one of his soldiers came to tell him that in exploring an aqueduct which had been stopped, he

had found that the passage for the water could easily be enlarged so as to admit armed men.

Once more he summoned the native magistrates, but the inhabitants would not submit, and he sent on the bravest of his men, with two trumpets and with lanterns, while he made an attack to divert the attention of the Goths. The way was long, and the soldiers found themselves in the very heart of Naples, in a basin with very steep sides, impossible, as it seemed, to climb. One man, however, scrambled up and found himself in a hovel, where he obtained a rope and pulled up his companions.

The Goths who were resisting the escalade, threw down their arms when they were attacked from behind. Belisarius did his utmost to stop slaughter and plunder, but could not entirely succeed, for many of his soldiers were savage Huns, barely kept under restraint at any time.

26. How did Belisarius' soldiers enter the city of Naples?

---

---

---

Theodatus remained in Rome, and appointed a brave general called Vetiges by the Greeks, but whose name was probably Wittich, to the



## Belisarius

command. The army suspected treachery, raised Wittich on their shields, and proclaimed him king. Theodatus fled, and was murdered on his way, in 536. Wittich thought it better to draw off to Ravenna to reorganize his army, so the way to Rome was left open to Belisarius, who had only to summon a small garrison to submit.

27. What leader was murdered in 536 CE?

---

---

---

Belisarius gained Rome in the March of 537, and immediately repaired the defenses. Indeed there was need, for Wittich besieged Belisarius there for a whole year, and he had terrible difficulties to contend with. The Roman populace had lost all their spirit of patriotism, and murmured from the first that with a mere handful of soldiers, Belisarius should bring down the Goths upon them. When the distresses of a protracted siege came on them, the Romans loudly complained, though all the useless mouths were safely sent off by sea to the fertile fields about Naples.

It is impossible to dwell at length on the events of the siege and the gallant deeds on either side. The

Goths, under Wittich, were gallant enemies, but the diseases of the Campagna reduced their numbers. Finally, late in the March of 538, Wittich broke up his camp and retreated to Ravenna. There Wittich called the Franks to his assistance, but they were mere barbarians, who plundered Goths as well as Italians and added to the general misery of the country. At last, in 539, Wittich yielded Ravenna to Belisarius who sent him to Constantinople, where he lived in honor and prosperity.

28. Who was sent to Constantinople, where he lived in honor and prosperity?

---

---

---

Justinian recalled his general, always fearing the result of his success. The city of Pavia was still left to the Goths, and here they chose as king, a kinsman of Wittich, called Totila, young, gallant, and generous. The utter incapacity and greed of Justinian's governors left the country open to him, and he traversed the whole peninsula collecting Goths again to his standard, till their kingdom was restored. Indeed the whole of the land was so desolate that hardly any opposition was offered.



## Belisarius

29. Why did Justinian recall Belisarius?

---

---

---

---

---

---

In 544 Justinian was obliged to send Belisarius back to Italy, but most insufficiently supplied with men and money. He had in the meantime been fighting on the Persian frontier, with the great King Chosroës, and with more success than could have been hoped for with such means as were at his disposal. Belisarius came to Ravenna, but his forces were too scanty to enable him to undertake any enterprise, and where he did not command in person, the so-called Roman captains were uniformly beaten.

Totila occupied Rome in 546, and tried to destroy it, overthrowing the walls and beginning to ruin the ancient buildings. Belisarius wrote to him a remonstrance, telling him how after-ages would regard such destruction. Totila actually thanked the great general for his advice and spared the churches and monuments, but carried off all the inhabitants, so that when, forty days later, Belisarius re-entered the city, not a man was found there.

30. Who occupied Rome in 546 CE?

- Belisarius
- Justinian
- Totila
- Wittich

Belisarius tried to rebuild the defenses, but Justinian would not send him money or men. When Totila again advanced, Belisarius was forced to abandon the beloved and honored city. Justinian then recalled Belisarius, preferring to leave Italy to its fate rather than trust to his unswerving loyalty. An unwarlike despot, who knew that the will of an army might at any time raise a popular captain in his stead, could hardly fail to dread the one man who was beloved by his soldiers and always successful. The Empress Theodora was dead, and no honors awaited Belisarius, only undeserved suspicion.

Once again, however, the great man was called for. The Bulgarians were desolating Thrace. There was an outcry that none but Belisarius could save the Empire. He was placed at the head of only 300 old soldiers, and found the peasants helpless and incapable. Yet Belisarius succeeded in repulsing the enemy and driving them beyond the Danube.

The outcries of admiration alarmed the emperor, now in his eightieth year, and the notion that Belisarius, almost as old, must be a

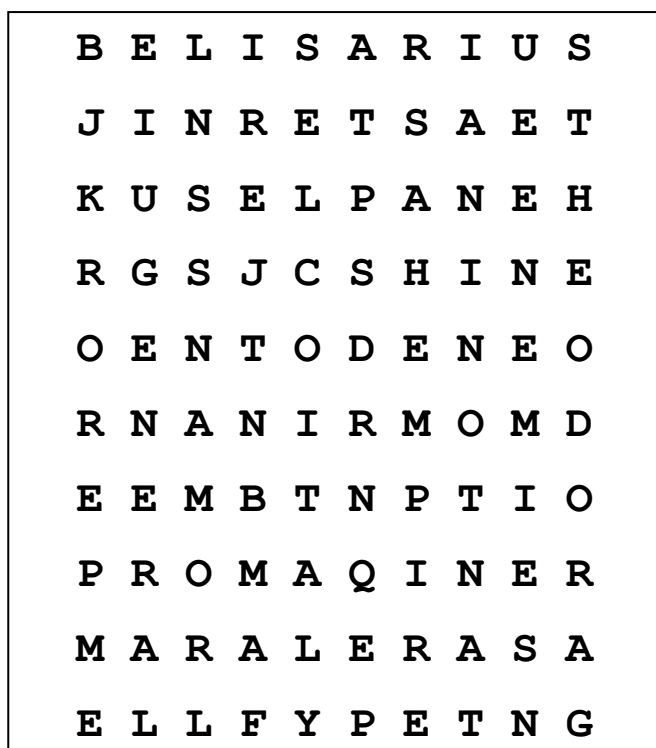


## Belisarius



*Belisarius receiving alms.*

### Word Search Puzzle



Antonina  
Belisarius  
eastern  
emperor  
empire  
enemies  
general  
Italy  
Justinian  
Naples  
Romans  
Theodora