

Belisarius

c. 505–565



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Belisarius was a general under Justinian I in the Byzantine Empire. Belisarius' loyalty to his emperor and his courage in battle earned him respect as one of the Byzantine Empire's greatest generals.



As you read the biography below, think about how Belisarius' loyalty helped him to continue serving his emperor.

The Byzantine Empire, located in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, was a continuation of the Roman Empire. Belisarius was the greatest general of Byzantine Emperor Justinian I. In fact, it was largely because of Belisarius' successful military campaigns that the Byzantine Empire expanded during Justinian's reign. Although Justinian was jealous of Belisarius and often did not give him the support he needed, Belisarius' loyalty never changed. He continued to serve Justinian faithfully.

Belisarius began his military career as a royal bodyguard. Justinian appointed Belisarius to a position of command when Belisarius was about 25 years old. Belisarius became a hero in the war against Sasanian Persia. He also put down an **insurrection** in Constantinople. When Belisarius conquered the Vandal kingdom in only two battles, his reputation and popularity grew. He became so popular that Justinian became jealous and feared that Belisarius might want to take over his throne.

When the Ostrogoths surrendered to Belisarius in Italy, they asked him to become their emperor but Belisarius refused. This refusal should have quieted Justinian's fears, but it did not.



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VOCABULARY

insurrection revolt, rebellion

empress wife of the emperor; female ruler of the empire

In fact, Justinian showed his disapproval of Belisarius' popularity by recalling Belisarius from Italy, only to send him a year later to fight in Mesopotamia. While there, Belisarius had problems with some disorderly soldiers. Justinian charged Belisarius with disloyalty and took away his command. Fortunately, Belisarius' wife and the **empress** were good friends. The empress intervened and Belisarius was reassigned to Rome. Even then, Justinian was still suspicious and did not give Belisarius the men or money he needed. This made Belisarius' campaign very difficult.

The empress died in 548. Soon afterwards, Justinian recalled Belisarius and retired him again. When the Huns attacked Constantinople, Justinian called on Belisarius once again. As before, Belisarius did not receive the support from Justinian that he needed. Fortunately for Justinian, Belisarius, relying on his cleverness, successfully repelled the Huns and saved Constantinople.

Belisarius then went back into retirement. Shortly afterwards, Belisarius was accused of being part of a conspiracy in which he probably was never involved. Belisarius, disgraced, was sent to prison. A short time later, he was pardoned. Finally, Belisarius was left in peace until he died in 565. Throughout his life, Belisarius demonstrated loyalty, courage, and sacrifice, even when the emperor did not appreciate his efforts.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Explain** For what reason was Justinian fearful of Belisarius?
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ACTIVITY

- 2.** Imagine that you are writing the script for a movie about Belisarius. Write a script for a short scene of the movie. Give an introduction explaining the scene. Include details in your script, like the props needed, costumes, and descriptions of the characters.