

Justinian's Flea Reading Guide

Justinian's Flea is a story of Justinian, the last Emperor of the Romans to be known as “the Great”. Born to a peasant woman in Macedonia about 487, Justinian left home at age 12 to begin a new life in Constantinople, the large and sophisticated capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. (NOTE: *Disregard his birth name “Petrus Sabbatius” and read the book considering only “Justinian” by which he is known in history.*) The book briefly explains the factors that contributed to the demise of the Western Roman Empire, the influence of various “barbarian” peoples, and the rise of Constantinople as the premier capital of the Empire. Justinian was a complex man: egotistical and humble, ambitious and paranoid, pious and pragmatic. There is romance in the story of his love for Theodora—Justinian changed Roman law to allow him to marry the former prostitute—and both their allies and enemies agreed they loved one another devotedly and faithfully until Theodora's death twenty years later. Justinian's interests and influence are evident today in law, architecture and the arts, political and military history, and economic practices. He understood and practiced the skill of finding, appointing, and supporting competent people to do the jobs he could not do personally. Throughout the reading, look for ways that the situations, problems, solutions, successes, and failures are similar to/different from or are relevant to today's world. Do not get bogged down in philosophical or religious issues/terminology/controversies or military exploits unless they are specifically noted in the reading assignment. Make notes about the specific topics in each chapter, compiling information cumulatively (many topics/persons are mentioned in several chapters). Some material—such as the political and military organization of the Roman Empire during the reigns of Diocletian and his successors—will complement/supplement the lectures. Such information is likely exam material. It will help if you make collate material with your course outline and lecture notes.

NOTE: (1) “Rome” and “Roman” are used to describe events and persons in the Eastern part of the Empire after the year 476 CE. **This is pertinent to the issue of when Rome fell or whether Rome fell.** Boldface indicates an especially important topic / event / person that may be an identification or useful in an essay topic.

(2) Persia was an ancient civilization that had tried for centuries to expand westward into Europe from its home in southwest Asia (modern Iran)—remember the ongoing conflicts between Persia and the Hellenic Greeks, Alexander the Great, and a sequence of Roman generals.

(3) Sixth-Century “Romans” did not practice separation of Church and State. See how this was expressed or demonstrated, such as attaching Christian/Biblical symbols to military victories or defeats. Is this done in our country that has a constitutional provision for separation of Church and State?

INTRODUCTION AND PROLOGUE (1-11)

Ignore the Law of Gravitation analogy. Distill the idea that the Roman Empire declined because of numerous, complex factors: internal & external, personal & impersonal, military, political, cultural, religious, economic, even infectious disease. **Identify/list the factors that contributed to the fragmentation of the Roman Empire** [hereafter RE] and the emergence of “Europe” as a collection of individual national states. What similarities do you see between the RE in the 4-6th centuries and the United States today?

How is the book organized?

Where did the “pestilence” originate and how did it spread to Constantinople?

CHAPTER 1 “Four Princes of the World” (15-36)

What was Justinian's background? Was he “born” to be a ruler?

Who was **Procopius** and why he was important? Information is scattered throughout the text.

Why were retired Roman soldiers living in Illyricum? What was the soldiers' ethnic background? How did serving in the Roman army affect the soldiers?

What were some the prominent features/characteristics of **Constantinople** when Justinian came to live there? (consider population make-up; housing; social, economic, cultural, religious, factors; physical appearance; public buildings) Does it resemble any U.S. city? How?

What was the most important city in the eastern Mediterranean?

What was the underlying motive for distributing free bread to the public? Was the policy successful? Why/why not?

What was the status / condition of the city of **Rome** by the late 5th Century CE?

Identify the policies of **Diocletian** and **Constantine**; tell how the policies affected the development of the RE (negatively or positively, short-term or long-term).

What was the first major issue that caused the Church to condemn some Christian as “heretics”? How was the issue resolved? Was it really settled? What happened to the “losers” in the debate?

Page 35, “[Justinian] regarded anything that threatened the unity of the empire as an affront against reason and faith alike . . .” How is that attitude similar to/ different from other rulers we have studied? (Keep this in mind as the course develops.)

CHAPTER 2 “We Do Not Love Anything Uncivilized” (37-63)

In your opinion, was **Constantine** a dedicated Christian or an opportunistic adherent to the faith? Why?

When and why did **Goths** enter the RE? How did the Goths respond to the RE and Christianity? Did they try to “fit in”? How? Why? *Also use material from later chapters.*

Why didn't **Attila** fully conquer the Western RE? How did the Huns respond to the RE and Christianity? Did they try to “fit in”? How? Why?

Who were the **Arian Christians**? How did they influence the RE?

How did the **Battle of Adrianople** (9 Aug. 378) affect the unity of the Eastern and Western parts of the RE?

Who was **Stilicho** and why was he important?

Who moved the capital of the Eastern RE to **Ravenna**? When? Why?

Why was **Alaric's** plundering of Rome in 410 important?

Why is **476** a pivotal year in the history of the RE?

Who was **Theodoric “the Great”** (not Strabo) and why was he important? Was he an “orthodox” Christian?

The key issue in the Monophysite controversy concerned the nature of Jesus Christ: was he all man, all God, or some combination of the two simultaneously or sequentially. Don't get bogged down in the particulars of this controversy unless you plan to become a priest or theologian! **Why was the controversy important in the developing split between the East and West in the RE?**

Who were the **Vandals**? How did they respond to the RE and Christianity? Did they try to “fit in”? How? Why?

CHAPTER 3 “Our Most Pious Consort” (64-88)

Who was **Boethius** and why was he important?

What were **Justinian's** favorable traits and achievements? Unfavorable traits and actions? *Material is also found in succeeding chapters.*

What were the *Blues* and the *Greens*? Are there groups like that in today's world?

What was **Theodora's** background? Since most of what we “know” about her was written in a “secret history” by her enemy, can we believe what he said? Should we question the reliability of sources when making judgments about people, plans, etc? Why was Theodora important in Justinian's life and reign?

Who was **Belisarius** and why was he important during Justinian's reign? Was being young and inexperienced a handicap when Justinian appointed him to defend the RE against the Persians?

Why was the **Battle of Dara** important? Without trying to grasp the intricacies of military tactics, tell how/why Belisarius defeated the Persians at Dara. [for example, better weapons such as the compound bow]

CHAPTER 4 “Solomon, I Have Outdone Thee” (91-118)

Hagia Sophia I: built 360 by Constantius; burned down in riots in 404

Hagia Sophia II: built 415 by Theodosius II; destroyed in Nika riots 532

Hagia Sophia III: built by Justinian, 532-37, still standing; converted to a mosque after the Ottoman conquered Constantinople in 1453; converted to a museum in 1932.

Can you think of any event or occurrence in your lifetime (or recent history) that resembles the **Nika revolt**?

How did Justinian and Theodora respond to the revolt and its dangers?

What were the purposes of Justinian's new “church” building? Were Anthemius and Isidore qualified to build the new **Hagia Sophia**? Why were they chosen for the task? What innovations were devised in the new Hagia Sophia? (architecture, decoration, construction, etc?) What were some of the problems encountered by the architects and builders? Look at the general picture rather than the particulars of physics and mathematics! Why did the original dome collapse?

How do you think you might have felt if you had lived in the 540s and attended a service in the Hagia Sophia?

CHAPTER 5 “Live Honorably, Harm Nobody, and Give Everyone His Due” (119-133)

Who was **Tribonian**? What was his contribution to the greatness of Justinian's reign?

Without bogging down in the myriad forms of Roman Law, why did it need to be simplified and better organized? Can you think of some similar situation in the US (codes that need to be simplified and better organized)?

When did the First Law Commission operate and what were its results?

When did the Second Law Commission operate and what were its results?

What are the 3 dimensions of the **Codex Iuris Civilis** (*Codex Justinianus*)?

How are the following treated in the *Codex*: liberty/equality, women's rights, the Church, serfs, kings' authority?

How did Western Europe inherit the *Codex Justinianus*?

CHAPTER 6 (134-163) “The Victories Granted us by Heaven?”

What “barbarians” entered the Western RE and where did they settle? What was their impact on the RE?

Why did Justinian want to restore the geographical boundaries of the RE? How did he attempt to achieve this? Was he successful? Why / why not? What was **Belisarius's** role in Justinian's plan? How did he attempt to achieve this? Was he successful? Why / why not?

Were "Roman" armies successful in North Africa, Italy, and Spain? Why / why not? (throughout the chapter)

What was the status / situation of Jews in the RE?

Why was **Ravenna** an important city in Italy? Why was it made the capital?

What was the **Secret History**?

How did the **Goths** try to become Romans?

Who/what was **Narses** and why was he important during Justinian's reign?

Was Italy hurt or helped by the invasions of Justinian's armies? How was Milan affected?

What happened to Arian "Christians" in Italy? (Arians considered themselves Christians, but their views had been declared heretical at the Council of Nicea in 325 CE)

How did the plague infestation move from Alexandria to Constantinople?

CHAPTER 7 (168-184) "Daughter of Chance and Number" SKIP THIS CHAPTER unless you really want to read about evolutionary biology and the development of plague bacterium.

CHAPTER 8 (185-197) "From So Simple a Beginning" SKIP THIS CHAPTER unless you really want to read about how plague spreads among neighboring populations.

CHAPTER 9 "The Fury of the Wrath of God" (Read 198-200 2nd paragraph and pp. 209 2nd paragraph – 223) You will read similar material in *A Distant Mirror*, relating to the "Black Death" that struck Europe in the 14th Century.

Why was Alexandria an important city?

How did victims of the disease suffer? How did societies react to the plague? How were burials handled? How many people died? What treatments did doctors advise?

CHAPTER 10 (227-252) "A Man of Unruly Mind" Read only pp. 251-52.

Khusro was the ruler of the Persian Empire in the 6th Century, the major foe of Justinian's Roman Empire.

What outbreaks of plague occurred in the 6th and 7th Centuries?

CHAPTER 11 (253-268) "No Small Grace" Read from bottom of page 255 to top of page 265

Where did the **Franks** originate? How did they try to assimilate into Roman civilization? Who was **Clovis** and why was he important? How did he become an ally of the Church?

How did Clovis's successors support or thwart Justinian's plans in Italy and western Europe?

How did the plague affect the Franks?

CHAPTER 12 (269-294) "A Thread You Cannot Unravel"

How did war and plague affect Justinian's empire? (consider political, economic, etc. impact)

What was the condition of **Rome** when it surrendered to Totila, the Ostrogoth general, on 17 Dec. 546?

How did Theodora's death affect Justinian?

How did the **Slavs** and **Lombards** impact Justinian's empire?

What were the purpose and the results of Justinian's invasion of Spain? How were the **Arian Visigoths** affected by the invasion and the subsequent invasion by Muslims?

How did the Frankish invasion of Italy in 553 affect Justinian's realm there? How did Justinian resolve the conflict? How was Italy affected by war, insurrections, and plague? In the long run, did Justinian's attempt at restoring geo-political control of Italy bring advantages or suffering for the local population?

What caused the collapse of the original dome of the **Hagia Sophia** in December of 557?

CHAPTER 13 (295-314) "This Country of Silk" Ignore material about the process of silk manufacture; focus on its importance to Justinian's empire.

Why was silk important in Justinian's realm? **How did Constantinople acquire silkworms?** What commodity has a similar impact in our current economy?

The *Ghassanids* and the *Lakhmids* were Arab tribes that were subsidized by the Romans and Persians, respectively, to serve as border troops between the two empires. Why was Arabia not affected by plague as dramatically as Justinian's empire?

Did Justinian's empire decay after his death in November of 565? Give examples and explain why it happened.

EPILOGUE (315-325) "Yarmuk" Why was the Battle of Yarmuk (17-20 August 636) important?

Why does the author think the plague was a major factor in the development of Europe?

Justinian's Flea Reading Assignment Instructions

CONSULT THE READING GUIDE FOR THE SPECIFIC CHAPTERS & PAGES TO READ.

- **Do not copy terms or passages from the text, even if you use quotation marks.** If you cannot explain or express information or ideas in your own words, then you don't understand the material.
- **Write answers on the printed sheet using dark blue or black ink.** You do not have to write complete sentences, but you must express complete thoughts--give adequate information to demonstrate that you know what a term (event, etc.) means! **Include pertinent information such as location and time. When describing a large group, such as "peasants", specify whether your response applies to all, some, most, etc.**
- **When an item says "give an example", cite a specific event, situation, etc.—not a generalization.**
- **For items pertaining to particular groups, give responses that apply **only** to that group.**
- **If a person's name includes a **number**, you must include the number.** It may help if you keep a brief index of people/numbers (Charles V) for referral.
- **Read the text carefully.** Be sure you understand the location, time, people, and other aspects of the story.
- **Give the chapter & page number for each response in this format: 1: 12.** I will deduct one-half point for each incorrect page citation. Write the page citations following your text, not in the left-hand margin.
- **Leave a 1-inch margin on both sides for grader's comments.**
- **Write legibly and neatly.** Do not turn in work that looks like it was done by a 1st-grader. You may need to write the response on another sheet of paper before filling it in on the assignment sheet.
- **Correct spelling is required.** Use the text or a dictionary to verify the correct spelling or meaning of words. Incorrect spelling will be penalized up to 15% of the score.
- **STAPLE LOOSE PAGES AND WRITE YOUR NAME ON BOTH PAGES.**

SCORE _____

NAME _____

Justinian's Flea Reading Assignment ▪ PART I

PART I: Read Introduction through Chapter 5. Part I is worth 50 points plus bonus points—each item is 3 points. Select responses from the entire reading for Part I.

I. Identify 2 critical factors that contributed to the fragmentation of the late Roman Empire.

1. INTERNAL

2. EXTERNAL

II. What was the **first major issue** that caused the Church to condemn some Christian as “heretics”?

III. How was the issue (II) resolved? What happened to the “losers” in the debate?

IV. Identify a characteristic of Constantinople at the time Justinian moved there.

V. **GOTHS**

1. Where did they originate?

2. Why did they begin entering Roman imperial lands?

3. Identify a tactic they used to try to become “Romans”.

VI. Who moved the capital of the Eastern RE to **Ravenna**?

When?

Why?

VII. Why was the Monophysite controversy important in the developing split between the East and West in the RE?

1.

2. BONUS

VIII. How was Theodora a good wife and empress to Justinian?

1.

2. BONUS

IX. What made the Hagia Sophia such a remarkable structure?

1.

2. BONUS

X. How did Tribonian contribute to the greatness of Justinian's reign?

XI. Who/what was Procopius?

XII. Why was Boethius important in Justinian's reign?

1.

2. BONUS

SCORE _____ NAME _____

Justinian's Flea Reading Assignment ▪ **PART II**

PART II: Read Chapter 6, 9-13, and Epilogue (see Reading Guide for specific selections). Part II is worth 50 points plus bonus points—each item is 3 points. Select responses from the entire reading for Part II.

I. Why was Belisarius important in Justinian's reign? [You may use information from Part I for this item.]
1.

2. BONUS

II. What was the status / situation of Jews in the RE?

III. Identify a way that victims of the plague suffered.

IV. Identify a 6th Century medical treatment for plague.

2. BONUS

V. The Franks thwarted Justinian's plan to reunite the Roman Empire.

1. Where did the **Franks** originate?

2. How did they try to assimilate into Roman civilization?

VI. Describe the condition of Rome when it surrendered to Totila on 17 Dec. 546?

1.

2. BONUS

VII. What were the consequences of Justinian's invasion of Spain? [consider immediate and long-term impact]

1.

2.

VIII. How did the Lombards impact Justinian's empire?

IX. Why was silk important in Justinian's realm?

2. **BONUS** What commodity has a similar impact in our current economy?.

X. Why did the Eastern Roman Empire decline after Justinian's death? [consider immediate and long-term impact]

1.

2.

XI. In your opinion—based on the reading—what was Justinian's greatest strength as a ruler?

2. In your opinion—based on the reading—what was Justinian's greatest weakness as a ruler?

XII. How did the plague infestation move from Alexandria to Constantinople?

1.

2. **BONUS** Identify a contemporary situation that is similar to the spread of plague in Justinian's reign.