

# **Julian Study Guide**

## **Julian by Gore Vidal**

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## Plot Summary

The story begins as two old friends, Libanius and Priscus, correspond regarding a manuscript written by Julian. Though Priscus agrees to send a copy of the manuscript to Libanius, he declines to be part of the published project. He does, however, add notes throughout the story, sometimes correcting Julian's take on situations and sometimes adding details not included by Julian. Julian's early childhood was fraught with danger and intrigue. As a youngster, Julian was ripped from his home and those he loved - including his father and a beloved teacher. His father was then killed by Julian's own cousin, Constantius. Julian says he was certain he would be next and spent most of his younger years worrying for his life. Julian's brother, Gallus, was made Caesar long before Julian even realized he craved the power of the political offices of the day. However, Constantius had Gallus beheaded soon after naming him Caesar. Julian himself had agreed to become a monk at an early age, but not through any dedication to the brotherhood. He'd allowed Constantius and others in power to believe he would become a monk in an effort to prove he had no political aspirations and was not a threat to the throne. He claims that the time studying was the best of his life, though he later indicates a true love of his political power.

Soon after Gallus was beheaded, Constantius summoned Julian. Julian believed that he would also be killed, but he found a supporter in Constantius' wife, Eusabia, who came to Julian's defense. Julian was, after all, Constantius' last surviving relative. He never had a son of his own though his second wife had a daughter after Constantius' death. Constantius took his time making a decision. There were some who insisted Julian was dangerous. Yet he finally decided that Julian should become Caesar in his own right. Constantius also presented Julian a wife, the much older Helena, who was also Constantius' sister. Julian and Helena were never close until near the end of her life. Helena miscarried and delivered a child who died shortly after childbirth. It wasn't until near the end of Helena's life that she told Julian that Eusabia had caused the deaths of their children. Julian's own troops called for him to accept the title, Augustus. Julian carefully staged the event so that it appeared he had no choice but to accept or die. To Constantius, he continued to pledge his loyalty, though he began attempts to amass the army necessary to overthrow his cousin. Julian had several outstanding victories on the battlefield, and Constantius took credit for them. As it turned out, the two men never faced each other in battle.

Constantius died, leaving Julian to rule. Julian spent the majority of his life discrediting Christianity. Though he didn't often openly disdain the religious practices of the day, he prayed often to Apollo, god of the sun. Julian died in battle, the victim of a spear thrown by his own body guard, Callistus, who claimed to have committed the act in an effort to protect Christianity from Julian. Callistus grew rich from payment for his action. Julian did not name an heir to the throne.



# I

## I Summary

The story begins as two old friends, Libanius and Priscus, correspond regarding a manuscript written by Julian. Libanius plans to title the work, "On Avenging the Emperor Julian." Libanius takes the stand that the two have nothing to lose by publishing the manuscript. Though Priscus agrees to send a copy of Julian's personal papers to Libanius, he declines to be part of the published project. He does, however, add notes throughout the story, sometimes correcting Julian's take on situations and sometimes adding details not included by Julian. Letters between the two men make up the first chapter. Some of the discussion is mundane - the cost of copying a manuscript, for example. The two also provide a look into their own lives. Priscus talks about his wife, Hippias, and both discuss the various aches, pains and ills that accompany old age. Priscus tells of his trips to a harlot, and Libanius says he is amazed that his friend has the stamina for such activities. Their discussion also encompasses the newest royalty in the land and Julian's own rise to power. According to Priscus, Julian's own rise was a matter of fate, and the country can't expect to be so fortunate in their next leaders.

## I Analysis

Libanius and Priscus recall the days of youth with fondness. It could be a stretch to assume that they want to return to those times, but there's little doubt that they are glad to talk about their actions, activities and adventures, especially when it pertains to their interaction with Julian. Both are feeling the frailty of age and devote at least some of their letters to advice - on diet, for example. It's Libanius who wants to publish Julian's memoirs. It's interesting to note that Libanius believes he has nothing to lose by publishing the manuscript. Priscus, on the other hand, points out that he's still rigorous enough for sexual activities and that he has no intention of cutting his life short by displeasing those in power.



## II

### II Summary

Chapter Two begins the story in Julian's own words. He begins with his memories as a six-year-old boy with a love of learning. He spends much time with Mardonius, a tutor who lays the foundation for Julian's later studies. He recalls a dream in which the sun was calling to him. He flew into the sun and later questioned Mardonius at length about the possible importance of that dream. He believed the sun to be his protector from that day on, but he also becomes aware of the "One God," though he never explains what or who that is. Julian also talks of his memories of his own father. He says that conversations with his father were rare, but talks of one particular day when he met up with his father and the estate manager in the atrium of their home. Julian says he was embarrassed when he father told the estate manager that Julian was "the best part" of the family's estate. Julian's father ended with a command to "guard him well." Julian explains that the lack of communication between father and son had nothing to do with affection, but that it was because of his father's shy nature. He said his father simply didn't know how to act around children, even his own.

### II Analysis

Julian will eventually turn his life over to the sun god. He believes that deity protects him, and he trusts in that more than any other single person or thing. The fact that Julian recalls dreams at such an early age is important as he believes in dreams, signs and omens for his entire life. In fact, he later bases major, life-altering decisions on those dreams, signs and omens. One must wonder what impact Julian's relationship with his father had on the youngster's life. As Julian's mother died when he was very young, he has no memories of her. It's interesting to speculate whether Julian's life would have been different had he had a childhood filled with the love of his parents, rather than the attention of tutors.



## III

### III Summary

At age eleven, Julian's life is again in jeopardy. The death of the Bishop, who'd been appointed guardian of Julian and his brother Gallus, meant that the fate of the boys was again in question. At this point, the enmity Gallus has for Julian becomes evident as he tells Julian that he doesn't want to die. Julian's own death would be little loss, according to Gallus. Julian has learned his lessons well and can quickly "parrot" scripture and passages from writing he studied to support almost any point. He also learns to be politically correct in his assessment of Christianity rather than to share his true feelings on the subject. Though Julian already has strong doubts about Christianity, he and Gallus agree to build a chapel dedicated to St. Mammias, a shepherd whose remains could supposedly cure an array of diseases. The two boys built the chapel, but the structure collapsed. Both boys carried on an affair with a woman in their household, and Julian's account includes comparisons of his own experiences with those he believes Gallus has. In this case, the fact that the boys shared a mistress gives Julian a good basis for comparison. He doesn't condemn Gallus, but seems almost to admire the fact that his brother can have a woman put forth all the sexual effort while he merely waits to be satisfied. It's interesting to note that Julian gives few details of his own sexual encounters.

### III Analysis

Julian is afraid and worries for his own life. His brother, Gallus, is also worried for his life to the exclusion of everything else. Gallus' own selfishness is first seen here. Julian's own relationship with Gallus is something of a mystery. He never really says he hates Gallus, though his brother gave him ample reason. He seems to be jealous, as in the case of the woman who had an affair with both boys. Julian says the woman clearly favored Gallus with his light-complexion and good looks. In the case of the chapel, Julian's own disregard for Christianity was later used as a reason to blame the collapse of the chapel to St. Mammias on Julian.



## IV

### IV Summary

Julian was 16 when Constantius paid the boys a visit. He is naturally nervous as this cousin can decide whether Julian and Gallus live or die. Both study furiously, and Julian admits to being amazed by the display that Constantius provided. There was a parade of officials and an array of clerks and servants accompanying Constantius. Their meeting with Constantius was brief. Gallus put on his best behavior, winning Constantius' approval. He also told Constantius that Julian wished to become a priest. Julian didn't disagree. It's while Constantius is visiting that Julian first meets Oribasius of Pergamom, a physician to Constantius who would become one of Julian's best friends. Julian had a favored groom at this point in time, Hilarius. Gallus beat him almost to death and told Julian there was no reason. Gallus expected to become Caesar but would have to wait some time for the honor. He was transferred to his mother's estate, and the brothers never again lived together.

### IV Analysis

Gallus shows the first signs of true cruelty that will become his trademark in later years. The beating of Hilarius left Julian in a rage, but he takes no outward action. It could be that Julian surprises himself by speaking out to Gallus and stopping the beating. However, it could be that he's more surprised that the two never have a confrontation over the situation. It's likely a statement of Julian's "awe" of his brother and his youth that he doesn't force a confrontation. In later life, Julian will take risks as he works to gain and retain political power. Julian's first meeting with his powerful cousin provides Julian the first taste of the power that royalty wields. It's a taste that would eventually lead to his quest for the title Augustus. He admits to being overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of the emperor's entourage and his royal appearance.



# V

## V Summary

Julian meets up with Mardonius, his former tutor. Mardonius warns Julian that he's being watched and must be mindful not to appear threatening to Augustus. This is also the point in time at which Julian meets up with Libanius, the person who would become a teacher to Julian and who would later compile his memoirs. Julian longs to be an ordinary student. By chance, his bodyguard awakes one morning with a fever, allowing Julian to go to the baths alone. Here he again meets Oribasius, and becomes acquainted with students Basil and Gregory. He also meets the philosopher Aedesius. It's when Julian meets Sosipatra, a soothsayer of sorts, that he's given a sign of greatness to come. She also predicts a warrior's death in Phrygia, the site of Julian's death. It's also in this chapter that Julian is "born again" as a child of the religion Mithras. Gallus is named Caesar and marries Constantius's sister, Constantia.

## V Analysis

Though Sosipatra's words are considered treason and could bring death to those who listen, Julian is intrigued. He continues to say that he is indifferent about political power and has no political aspirations, but there's little doubt that he's captivated each time signs, omens and dreams point in that direction. Julian's time of "rebirth" as a child of Mithras solidifies his belief that the sun is his protector. Julian will, throughout his life, tend to interpret dreams in such a way that favor him. He adamantly refuses to admit that dreams, signs and omens are nothing more than happenstance. He does say that he believes those things can be misinterpreted. Julian's time with Mardonius reminds him of his childhood, and the reader should remember that it's Mardonius's early teachings that have brought Julian this far. Julian early on admits that Mardonius claimed to be a devout "Galilean" or follower of the Christian faith, but leaned toward Hellenism and taught Julian from authors such as Homer. Had Julian not had that background, he might never have battled against Christianity and become the target of the murder plot that took his life.



# VI

## VI Summary

Julian blames Constantia for Gallus' desire to rise to power as Augustus, and for at least some of his vicious nature. When Libanius is summoned to Gallus' home, he walks in on a boxing match. The men are nude and fighting to the death. Libanius describes the rapt attention Gallus and Constantia pay to the two men. Gallus even kicks the dead man at the end of the fight and hugs the winner. Libanius says that Gallus doesn't even notice him in the room until Constantia points out the visitor. Julian meets with Gallus and observes his brother having sex with a slave girl. Gallus advises Julian that he must be careful, that people are discussing Julian's lack of faith in God. Gallus has a disastrous episode in which he laid blame for a lack of food on a man named Theophilus, resulting in the man's death at the hand of the people. Constantius recalls Gallus who drags his feet in obeying. Meanwhile, Gallus' wife, Constantia died of fever. Gallus was beheaded, and Julian lived the next few months under house arrest until he met Constantius' wife, Eusebia, who would become his protector. Constantius doesn't make Julian Caesar in his brother's place, but dismisses him to Athens to continue his studies.

## VI Analysis

Julian claims to be shocked by his brother's behavior, though he's seen several indications of Gallus' true nature. Cruelty comes easily to the man, and it's Libanius and Prscus who discuss the possibility that Julian was enamored with his brother's good looks. Julian also claims to have hated the royal court and to be happy to leave. He spends much time learning the proper etiquette. When he becomes ruler, he changes many things about the court. However, it seems to be only those superficial things that are changed. Julian loves the power he holds as emperor, but doesn't want to be bothered with the memorized greetings and other rituals used in court affairs. After the death of his brother, Julian is again allowed to return to his studies, but he does so with the constant dread that he'll be recalled. It's noteworthy that each time the possibility that Julian will be killed by Constantius, he becomes more vocal about his desire to do nothing more than study. On several occasions, he works on a plan to run away and hide. Yet each time he's given a bit of power, he immediately seizes it and begins to work on ways to increase it. That's never more true than when he's named Caesar.

## VII

### VII Summary

Julian calls the 47 days he spent in Athens, "the happiest of my life, so far." Julian manages to elude his bodyguards on the first day in the city and meets with Basil and Gregory. He is introduced to Macrina, with whom he would later have an affair. Priscus says there were rumors that Macrina gave birth to a son who was Julian's child, though it was never formally acknowledged. Macrina's uncle, Prohaeresius, predicts Julian's rise to power. He first meets Priscus, who describes Julian as handsome and talkative. Priscus also says he later met with Macrina, who asked after Julian's wife and had become, in Priscus' words, a disagreeable woman. Libanius talks of his one and only private audience with Gallus and Constantia - the boxing event. He says that Gallus had the look of a deranged man and that he was "quite unnerved." Libanius believes the pair are evil and aren't willing to excuse their actions, though Julian says on at least one occasion that Gallus was led astray by Constantia.

### VII Analysis

Julian is enamored with knowledge and feels he is in his element in Athens. He describes in detail the city, buildings and people he meets. Julian describes his brief period of freedom as a happy time, but then his bodyguards arrive, putting an end to the freedom and forcing him to again become cousin and potential threat to the Augustus. It's during this time that Julian talks more about his fascination with men who have beards. He's worn one himself, though he admits that it still has the straggly appearance of youth. Julian talks of Hadrian, a philosopher he admires, and says that he most admires him for his beard. Julian also meets up with Gregory and Basil, poor, young students. They are the epitome of what he believes he'd like to be. In keeping with one of the book's major themes, Julian spends a great deal of his time in Athens finding himself. He doesn't necessarily want to be poor, though he isn't rich by any stretch of the imagination. He has yet to discover that he does want to be in power, and that he'll eventually plot to take over as ruler of Rome.



## VIII

### VIII Summary

Julian requests to be "initiated into the mysteries" by the Heirophant of Greece, a man charged as custodian of the mysteries of Eleusis, a city 14 miles from Athens. Julian describes the nine days of initiation into those mysteries, but is sufficiently vague to keep the process the mystery it is apparently supposed to be. He does tell of one part of the event. On the second day, those being initiated bathed a pig in the sea before offering it for sacrifice. He writes, "It is an amazing sight to watch several thousand people bathing in the sea, each with a squealing pig." Though Julian claims an open mind for worship of all deities, he says he disapproves of the worshipers at the shrine of Aphrodite, because those who visit the shrine have the option to "enjoy a priestess." As part of the initiation, Julian walked across a bridge. During the walk, some thirty hooded men jeered and cursed at those making the trek. Julian reminded himself of others who had endured, but he says the curses were "formidable." One said that he looked like a goat. Others said he wasn't a true philosopher. The only comment that Julian says was unexpected was that he was a coward and feared battle. Macrina shares this time with Julian, though she contends that she doesn't like the Christians as they are cruel and doesn't like the "mysteries," because she believed there was nothing after death. Priscus, who is also privy to these "mysteries," says that Julian revealed too much. Julian was then recalled by Constantius and becomes increasingly concerned when officials who greet him seem also unsure of his fate.

### VIII Analysis

Julian seems always excited about the gods, ceremonies and rites associated with alternate religions. He seems to continually struggle with religious issues. He works to mesh the teachings of philosophy, writings of Homer and confusing array of deities. Though he is against Christianity, he claims to have religious experiences related to the gods of mythology. At this point, he isn't comfortable making his views on Christianity widely known and says he is nervous when he's accused of hating Christians during his initiation into the "mysteries." Julian will eventually encourage everyone to turn from Christianity and accept Hellenism. He says that he wants freedom to worship as he pleases and finds ways to hide his worship of the various deities. Yet when he comes to power and begins to worship the gods outright, he becomes increasingly intolerant of anyone who wants to continue to worship as a Christian. He describes his departure from Athens as "too painful to describe." He never returns to Macrina, though he does later instruct a newly-appointed leader help her and her family if she should need anything.



# IX

## IX Summary

When Julian arrived in Milan, he is greeted by one of Constantius' eunuchs who doesn't salute. Since the eunuchs of the day held a high place in the royal chain of command, Julian took that as a bad sign. He is placed under house arrest for thirteen days until he's summoned by Constantius. Eusebia tells Julian that she's urged Constantius to make him Caesar. Constantius does make that announcement, saying that the world is too large for him to govern and that he needs a presence that can extend past his own location. Julian was introduced to his future wife, Helena. During his coronation, Julian salutes the legions. It was an absolutely forbidden action in court but one that won him instant approval among the people. Julian and Helena were married November 13, 355. Helena is much older than Julian, and the two will not become close with the exception of a brief period before Helena's death. Julian begins to assert himself to those he had formerly sought to appease, calls for Oribasius to join him and was immediately sent to Gaul on military maneuvers. Julian's army is small, and he and he sees Constantius for the last time.

## IX Analysis

Julian has been trying to get along with those in power as a self-preservation mechanism. Now he knows he must assert himself if he's to have any true power. Constantius works to keep Julian's power at a minimum, cutting his army and putting spies in place who'll report any signs of revolt. Julian recognizes it for what it is and works to avoid open disloyalty to Constantius while achieving his own objectives, including military success. As Julian and Constantius part, it's the last time the two will see each other in person though there will be communications by messenger over the months of the military campaign. Julian doesn't describe his relationship with Helena in any detail, an interesting fact in itself. He never claims to love her but never vocalizes any objection to the marriage. He also never claims to know about the child Macrina gave birth to who could be Julian's heir. Remembering that Julian may have expected others to read his memoirs, it's likely that he withholds certain facts or things that would put him in a less-than-honorable light.



# X

## X Summary

Julian spends the winter of 355-356 in Gaul with few troops and struggling to find a way to survive. He has his first taste of battle and says he is delighted to discover that he is not a coward. There are no major battles. Though Julian is prepared to fight, he has shared control with Constantius' own generals. Oribius is with Julian, and it's he who reminds Julian that Constantius has given him a detailed list of instructions. However, when Julian opens the packet, it's information on etiquette, right down to recipes for dinner parties. Julian briefly considers running away. He tells Oribius that he would even be willing to become a slave, for that's all he is in his current position. Julian describes his passage through Gaul. He says that he wonders about the fact that Constantius prompts fear and awe in his subjects. Julian says the people seem to love him, and he wonders about the difference. Julian receives a cool reception from the military and political commanders. Though they work at thwarting his efforts, they aren't willing to openly defy or denounce his authority. Julian then describes the Gauls. He says they are careful about appearances and never wear ragged or dirty clothes. However, they seem always ready for battle. Julian says that it's not at all uncommon for a man to call for his wife's aid in the midst of a fight, and that her attempts to help tend to make the man a formidable enemy. Julian accepts another omen as a sign that he will survive the military campaign and throws himself into the endeavor. Julian refuses to sit idly, though that's exactly what Constantius's loyal commanders are doing. He continues to push and is finally granted permission to make an attempt to retake Gaul from the Germans.

## X Analysis

Julian is anxious, but has not yet attained any real power. Though he's Caesar and as such, outranks the military leaders, he knows that Constantius supports those generals. He's meant to be a figurehead and truly expects to die in the region as a "sacrifice" by Constantius as a sign of his commitment to his people. Julian's belief in that is further borne out by Constantius' list of instructions. There's nothing regarding war or military strategies, but requirements of how Julian is to behave. It seems that Constantius is willing to sacrifice his kinsman, but isn't willing to have Julian embarrass him by making a social blunder. Julian laments the fact that he's been sent to accomplish a mission, given no tools to do so and is probably expected to fail. The fact that he tells Oribius that he wants to run away is likely a brief return to his old self as the youth who loved to study and was happiest when surrounded by those like-minded individuals. As always, Julian is dependent on the signs and omens, though he always interprets them in his best interests. It would be interesting to see what would happen if there were a series of signs against his rise to power and military success. Julian is excited by the prospect of heading into battle and seems optimistic about his own future. He also sees no reason that Constantius wouldn't trust him. He says that if he is successful at taking Gaul, Constantius will have "no choice" but to trust. One must wonder whether Julian hasn't

yet recognized his desire for power and truly believes he doesn't desire it, or if his writing reflects what he wants people to remember.



# XI

## XI Summary

Julian, with 12,000 troops, finally met the Germans and set Gaul free. Julian was required to carry an effigy of Constantius along and described that as a "small humiliation." Julian receives word that Helena has given birth to a son, but that the baby died. Eusebia paid a midwife to cut the umbilical cord too short, though Julian doesn't learn this fact until Helena is on her deathbed. Helena apparently knows what happened to the child. For his own part, Julian says that he doesn't really know what he should feel. He doesn't dwell on the loss of the child, expressing little other than the fact that the baby died. Even when he finds out about the death of the child, Julian makes no statements regarding his feelings on the matter. Julian has trouble retaining his army and deserters are common. Julian becomes a hero in 357 when he comes to the aid of the people of Barbatio. He continues to battle those in command of troops that should have come to his aid, but manages to succeed on the battlefield, nonetheless. Priscus was beside Julian through much of the battle that followed, and the Germans were soundly defeated.

## XI Analysis

Julian's own soldiering experience came late in life, and he believes he was expected to fail at the warfare for which he was so poorly prepared. However, he inspired a fierce loyalty in his men and spent as much effort as possible working to ensure that the men knew of his appreciation. It's important to remember that this is Julian's account of the events of his life. As is human nature, it's possible that he doesn't reveal everything and even that he slants some information in his favor. It's a discussion between Libanius and Priscus later that indicates that they remember some details differently, and that Julian may not have been beloved by everyone he met, including his own men. Julian later learns of Eusebia's action that caused the death of his child. Yet citing her protection of him and support for his rise to Caesar, he claimed to have never stopped loving her. Julian's relationship with Eusebia was never sexual, at least that he admits. However, it is a complicated relationship. There's never any real indication as to why she took such an interest in him.





## XII

### XII Summary

With continued military success, Julian begins to see Constantius as a weak, selfish ruler and begins to stand up for himself. He is outraged when Constantius claims the victory at Gaul was of his own doing. Years earlier, in Athens, Julian had been accused of being a coward with regard to the military. He says that he was relieved to find out that it wasn't true. He actually seems to seek out the fighting and joins his men, rather than commanding from afar. Julian fights to keep taxes lower while the people of the region of Gaul recovered from the battle with the Germans - one of his efforts to exert his own power. Helena miscarries, and Julian describes it as the "only sad matter that winter." This is virtually Julian's only comment on his feelings at the loss of his two children. Helena reveals that Eusebia is ill and that she killed both of Helena's children. She asked Julian how he determined which was more important, his two children or Eusebia. Constantius has a difficult battle while Julian claims another victory and garners aid from at least one additional military unit.

### XII Analysis

It's the first and only time Helena and Julian speak of Eusebia's action that caused the death of the two children, who were potential heirs to the throne. Julian's comment that it was "sad" that Helena miscarried is his only indication of his feelings. It could be that his own childhood is coming into play. Remember that Julian said his own father seemed at a loss of how to behave around his children. One wonders what kind of father Julian might have become, given the chance. Julian makes no comment on the fact that Eusebia is ill. It's likely that he now believes himself to be above the need for her protection. Though Julian is becoming increasingly popular and successful on the battlefield, he's also becoming more adept at the political actions necessary to succeed. Julian is truly maturing as a ruler. He sees the mistakes and the strengths of others and says he wants to build on those.



# XIII

## XIII Summary

Julian has another dream. A giant tree falls, and he believes a smaller tree, growing among the roots of the larger, is also doomed. In his dream, an unidentified man assured him that the small tree's root was strong and that it would grow. Julian took the dream to mean that Constantius would fall, and he would become Augustus. It was soon after the dream that Julian's army called for his assent to Augustus. Julian ignores them for a time. Then he is summoned to Helena's side. She urges him to accept. Julian then addresses the army, telling them he can't accept, but it's a carefully planned scene. Julian had predicted what would happen and says that he was prepared when the mob pushed their way to Julian and pick him up, demanding his acceptance. In this way, Julian accepts but can later tell Constantius that he had no choice, that he was forced to accept or be killed. Julian says that by doing so, he's avoiding being accused of treason and is still moving into power.

## XIII Analysis

Julian seems to have carefully planned the moment he'd be forced to accept the position of Augustus. His discussion with Helena is interesting in that the two have had few honest conversations. Julian himself says they are not close. Yet when he asks Helena what to do, she says she's always known he'll be Augustus, that the only question is whether the time is right. Julian is very calm as the people stand outside the palace calling for him. He indicates that he'll be going with the hope that the mob will grow tired and disperse. It would have been interesting to note what would have happened if the people had gone home. Julian doesn't indicate that he had anything to do with orchestrating the situation calling for his rise to Augustus, but it's possible. The reader will note that Julian says that happens in other places, and his calm assurance of the events could mean he was forewarned. By accepting the designation in such a way, it seems that he's working to hold onto the safety of being a loyal subject of Constantius while increasing his power. As is always the case, Julian is dependent on the dreams and signs for his decisions. In this case, he doesn't refer again to the dream about the tree, but it's likely on his mind.

# XIV

## XIV Summary

After Julian was named Augustus by his people, he goes to his wife's room. They briefly discuss the action, and Helena predicts that Constantius won't accept the situation. Julian intercepts a letter and finds that Constantius is making preparations to march his own military against Julian. Julian turned the situation to his advantage, taking the wheat Constantius had gathered. Julian recounts an episode while in Gaul during which he mistakes a man for Maximus, a friend and fellow philosopher. Julian said the man was a total bore and that he related the story, because he was reluctant to tell of his own decision to cross the Alps toward a confrontation with Constantius. He also claims that he didn't tell the man to go away and says that's a statement of his own tendency to avoid confrontation. Julian is openly derogatory of a treaty negotiated by Constantius. Helena dies, and her final discussion with Julian is regarding the need for new tiles on the roof of her favorite villa. Helena, at forty-two, was buried at Rome. Julian orders the tiles replaced and takes a vow of celibacy.

## XIV Analysis

Julian's quest for power is growing. He recounts the movements of Augustus with interest, making it clear that he's looking toward the future conflict. While he publicly retains the title Caesar, he seems to believe it's only a matter of time before he becomes the official Augustus. Toward that end, he consults wise men and prophets for signs of what's to come. While the military movements are taking up a great deal of his time, Julian is maintaining a household and spending time with friends and fellow philosophers, including Priscus. He seems to crave the companionship of those he considers academic equals. Julian, as a youth, repeatedly claimed that his greatest desire was to study. As he finds himself in a position of power, he throws incredible energy and effort into a military campaign. Still, he works on his writings at night, and Priscus says he often calls for his friends to share a few hours of intellectual conversation. Julian claims to feel nothing upon Helena's death, but does obey her dying request.



## XV

### XV Summary

Constantius marries Faustina, and Julian says that each of them were busy preparing for civil war. Julian's dislike of Christian holidays has been duly noted and Nebridius, the praetorian prefect, publicly announced that Julian would observe the Epiphany, the day Jesus was baptized. Julian says he voiced the correct words, but inwardly directed his prayers to Zeus. Julian again faces German invasion along his borders. Julian makes a decisive strike and also decides it's time to face Constantius. Julian becomes vocal in his desire to reinstate the gods as deities to be worshiped. Julian plans an ambitious attack on Constantius, but the Augustus dies before the two meet in battle. It's a friend who delivers the news simply by bowing to Julian and declaring that a letter had arrived for the "Augustus."

### XV Analysis

Julian's desires are complicated. He wants to dispute Christianity, but fears how a public display of his loyalty to the gods of mythology will be taken. He speaks of the desire to restore the gods to their place of honor, but for a long time only voices those goals to friends. None of those friends and advisers are optimistic that he can succeed, but it doesn't seem to change his mind. On this subject, Julian tends to hear the men saying that an ordinary man couldn't accomplish that feat. Julian seems to think that he's more capable on that front than anyone believes. Whether it's his own belief in Hellenism, his belief that others should logically doubt Christianity as he does, or his belief that he's destined to succeed, Julian seems to truly believe that he's going to put an end to Christianity and restore the deities to their proper place. Julian learns of Constantius' death in November when Oribasius brings him a letter. It's notable that Oribasius doesn't detail the means by which Constantius died, only that Julian is now Augustus.



## XVI

### XVI Summary

Priscus tells Libanius that Julian's account of the events that lead up to his crowning as Augustus could be at least slightly skewed. He points out that Julian tells of nothing but support from everyone except Constantius. Yet Priscus says that's not true, and that many of the "responsible" men in the Roman empire supported Constantius. According to Priscus, Julian sent "at least a dozen lengthy harangues" to the senates at Constantinople and Rome. He then describes Rome's outcry against Julian when the self-proclaimed Augustus demanded their loyalty. Priscus says he was at the senate in Athens when Julian's message was read, outlining the murders for which he blamed Constantius. Priscus says the senators didn't react at all, fearing to take a side. Julian hears details of Constantius' last days, including the fact that he died of a fever. Julian then learns of Constantius' will, naming him as his successor and asking him to care for Constantius' new wife, Faustina. As soon as Julian is truly and irrevocably ruler of Rome, he calls for sacrifices to the "old gods." While Julian's account indicates that the men of his army were delighted, Priscus says there was almost a mutiny because of the affront to God. Julian also discovers that Faustina is pregnant and reveals that she later had a daughter.

### XVI Analysis

Julian's description of his ascension to the throne is likely a flattering account of true events. Priscus says Julian isn't entirely accurate in all his statements. One notable event that happens during those early months is that Julian was bathing while his uncle and Oribaius sat nearby. Julian splashed the two, and they laughed. He says it occurred to him that men who become monsters began with harmless pranks, then progress rapidly to rape, torture and murder. He apologized and says he was thinking of the many "monsters" who had ruled Rome over the years. He seems to become more aware of the power he wields as time passes. Julian often indicates that he was praised and loved by everyone he met. Priscus and Libanius each say there were instances to the contrary. The discrepancy isn't clear. It could be that Julian simply didn't realize that he didn't hold one hundred percent of the love and loyalty of his people. Or it's possible that Julian's memoirs are slanted as the writer works to put himself in the best possible light.



## XVII

### XVII Summary

Julian begins work to strengthen the followings of the "true gods." He calls Christianity a "cult" and though he declares religious freedom, is working against Christianity. He meets with those at the head of religious groups other than the Christians and speaks frankly of his disdain for Christianity. Julian says the "Galilean," as he calls Jesus, was "a child" compared to Plato or Aristotle. He does admit that the moral teaching of Christianity is good in that Jesus taught honor, sobriety and goodness. Julian believes that Hellenism has failed simply because of a lack of organization. Julian's friend, Maximus, arrives in Constantinople, and Julian presents him to the political leaders. Priscus reveals that Maximus and his wife later made a suicide pact. She purchased poison and killed herself, but Maximus backed out. Julian again trusts in the signs of the true gods to plan his strategy, including a military strategy to capture Persia based on a conversation Maximus claimed to have had with Cybele. Julian also sent Oribasius to consult a priestess who communed with the gods. When Oribasius asked if Julian was destined to restore the holy temple of Delphi, the oracle's offered a negative answer. Priscus said that Julian instructed Oribasius to never mention the conversation to anyone. During Julian's early days of overseeing court, he discovers many excesses. Servants were being paid exorbitant wages and using their place in the palace for their own gain. After witnessing what could have been a sexual encounter of children prompted by eunuchs, Julian dismisses all the eunuchs along with a great many of the staff.

### XVII Analysis

Julian is becoming more confident in his role of power. While he openly supports alternate religions and hopes Christianity will become a thing of the past, he doesn't forbid worship of the "Galilean," as he calls Jesus. There seems to be little doubt that Julian truly believes in the gods he worships, but it's interesting that he instructs Oribasius to tell no one of the oracle's negative report regarding the rebuilding of a temple. In this case, Julian chooses to ignore the advice. Priscus says that he was apart from Julian for several months soon after that and that Julian's mood had changed dramatically during that time.



## XVIII

### XVIII Summary

Julian heads to Antioch but makes his way through several towns. He says his reasoning was to learn about the country so that he could make fair taxation decisions. He admits that he wanted to see the temples for himself. Again, he speaks of the division of the Christians and offers that as a hope that other religions will prevail. He says he bribed, cajoled and argued everyone he could into performing the rites of deities. He admits that there could come a point at which he forces the Galileans to drop their religion. Julian finds Nicromedia in ruins after an earthquake and offers money to help rebuild. Julian reigns over courts wherever he goes, and describes some of the scenes. Julian arrived in Antioch on a holiday, the festival that commemorates the death of Adonis. It's during his stay in Antioch that Julian decrees that Galileans may not teach the classics. Julian makes sacrifices often and works to appease his own gods while tearing down Christianity. Then the temple to Apollo was burned, and Julian blamed the Christians. In retaliation, he closed the cathedral, hoping to stop the Christian worship.

### XVIII Analysis

Julian has now put so much stock in the gods, signs and omens, that he can seldom make a move without first consulting the gods, priests and oracles. He begins his term as Augustus saying that men will have freedom to worship as they will, but he slowly begins to insist that others see religion as he sees it - that Christianity is a farce and worshipping the deities is correct. Julian is open in his own religious practices and says that he's taking every step he can to ensure the rise of Hellenism. It's interesting to note that he's willing to do something that he criticizes in Christianity in encouraging worshipers to go through the motions of Hellenism. Julian believes that if he gets people to perform the worship rituals of his gods, they'll eventually begin to believe.



# XIX

## XIX Summary

Priscus tells of the change he sees in Julian, and that the emperor has become "nervous and ill-tempered." Libanius begins the story of a famine in Antioch. As a city official, Libanius says that everyone could read the signs indicating that a tough year was ahead. There was little rainfall in the spring and by early summer, it was evident that the harvests would be extremely light. However, the city fathers did nothing to try to prepare. Libanius points out that purchasing grain from another country could have been an option. As humans are wont to do, the people began to look for someone to blame for the shortage of food. According to Libanius, it was Julian's bad fortune to have arrived in Antioch just as the food shortage began. The people blamed Julian, saying that he'd used too many supplies for his army. Libanius says that's not true, that the army had relied on Egyptian corn as the staple in their diet. Meanwhile, Julian continues to pray to the various deities and to make sacrifices. During one of those rituals, one thousand white birds were sacrificed. At another, one hundred bulls. Many who gathered to watch Julian make those sacrifices were actually only interested in eating the meat after the rites, according to Libanius. Julian is faced with the difficulty of dealing with that shortage. He claims to know nothing about money and depends on his financial adviser, Felix, who says fixing the price of a bushel of corn is the best way to deal with the problem. Julian declines but asks the senate to take on that task. Felix died a few hours later, and Julian says he'll never again have such a good adviser. As it turned out, Julian was forced again to intercede as the wealthy withheld grain to run up the price. Julian released corn destined for feeding his own army onto the market, ordered the prices fixed at less than the normal rate and briefly arrested the entire senate for failure to adhere to his earlier order. Julian then discusses the military campaign against Persia. Julian's official memoirs end here. The remainder of the book is taken from Julian's journal, which he kept in the field.

## XIX Analysis

As Priscus talks about the change in Julian - that he's become more moody and reserved - it's clear that the weight of the responsibilities are wearing on the Augustus. The duties as emperor are only part of the equation. Like many who are working toward a religious end, Julian wants to convert the world to Hellenism now. It appears that Julian is becoming what almost every person in authority has been throughout the ages. He's the scapegoat for everything that's wrong. Julian continues to see omens in everything, but he also continues to interpret them the best possible way for himself. Libanius and Priscus spend more time in personal talk, which gives us more insight into these two important characters. While they are outwardly polite, it's clear that they each perceive faults in the other.





## XX

### XX Summary

Julian offers a brief description of his arrival at the Euphrates. Priscus and Maximus were each in Julian's party, and Priscus goes into much greater detail about the event. He describes several of the "principal commanders," including Count Victor, Arintheus, Jovian, Nevitta, Dagalaif and Salutiarius Secundus. Priscus says that, at the beginning of the march, Julian is in "marvelous spirits." Weather was good, food plentiful and the defeat of the enemy seemed to be at hand. The problem, Priscus says, is that the omens don't bode well for the military campaign and for Julian, personally. Priscus says that Victor once sat down beside him in Julian's tent. He asked Priscus if he believed in Christ. When Priscus said he believed Christ had existed, but not that he was a god, Victor merely nodded, predicted a successful military campaign and moved to another topic. Julian is urged to return to Rome, to implement reforms he began. Yet Maximus confides that he's talked to Persephone, the Queen of the Dead, and that Julian is fated to die in Phrygia. This information, coupled with Maximus's assurance that the armies are far from Phrygia, restores Julian's faith in the military campaign.

Several things happen that Julian takes as a sign of his imminent death. One of his men is struck by lightning, and his hunters kill a lion. Both are signs that a king will fall. Maximus assures Julian that the king is not Julian, but a king of Africa. At Anatha, Julius meets a Roman soldier who'd been left behind when the Romans invaded that city sixty-six years earlier. Julian says he was moved by the meeting and granted the man transportation back to Rome, in order to be buried on Roman soil. Julian and a small scouting party are ambushed near Maiozamalcha. There's at least some question of how the attackers knew where Julian would be, and when, though Julian doesn't dwell on the question. By now, the army is some three hundred miles from Rome, but the generals fear going deeper into the country. They warn Julian that the men will refuse. Julian has a talk with Maximus during which he tells his friend that he isn't at all certain of victory. In fact, he believes he will die. Maximus tries to reassure him, but fails. Julian then gives the order for the troops to begin north, eventually heading toward home.

### XX Analysis

The question of religion seems to be always at the forefront of Julian's mind, at least with regard to the notes and text of his memoirs. He works at length to confer with the various deities and continues to put great stock in the signs and omens that appear, as well as information from Maximus. However, even Julian admits that he's less willing to do so when those signs and omens aren't what he wants to hear. It's interesting to note the Priscus and Victor have a discussion that touches on religion. Priscus assures Victor that he doesn't believe Christ was a god, and Victor seems to be questioning his own faith, or perhaps his lack of faith. It seems possible that Julian's zealous desires to serve

the myriad of gods has an impact on his troops, or at least on those commanders who keep company with Julian.



## XXI

### XXI Summary

Julian describes the fall of Maiozamalcha, including a lottery his soldiers created to divide the women found in the city. Julian was asked to join, though he'd taken a vow of celibacy. He says he looked for a child, planning to set her free. There were no youngsters, so he selected a boy. As it turned out, the youngster was a deaf-mute, and he served Julian until Julian's death. Julian claims to understand the boy's signs and that he's incredibly intelligent. Julian notes that the men were "delighted" with his choice and says that he believes they'd rather have a ruler who likes young boys than a ruler who is celibate. Near Ctesiphon, Julian's army comes face-to-face with the Persian army. The Romans will have to cross a river in order to engage the Persians, and it's evident that such a move would be suicide. Julian tells them that they'll take a day off for games, including horse racing. By doing so, he assures his men that he's confident of victory, raising the moral of the entire army. That night, Julian ordered the men to cross the river in boats. When the first wave reached the riverbank held by the Persians, Julian's remaining men could hear the fighting. Then all five of the boats used for the first crossing went up in flames. Julian immediately told the men that the burning boats were the signal that the way was cleared for the remainder of the army to cross. In this way, the Roman army advanced, pushing the Persians back. Priscus describes the scene of the battle on the following day. The Persian army used elephants as carriers for their archers. The elephants trampled men indiscriminately. According to Julian, the Romans lost only seventy-five men while slaughtering two thousand, five hundred Persians. Julian attempts to sacrifice a bull, but the liver appears to be diseased. He throws the liver and the knife to the ground, shouting that he'll never again sacrifice to Aries, the god of war.

### XXI Analysis

Julian's uncharacteristic show of temper during the sacrifice to Aries was explained by Priscus as the result of too little sleep. It seems that it could have been Julian expressing his own lack of religious confidence or his disgust over the selection of the diseased animal. Julian's decision to select a child from the captives being auctioned off by the soldiers is a testament of his own sense of fairness and responsibility. He wants to simply refuse his turn, but also wants the approval of his men and believes this is one way to attain that. He has taken a vow of celibacy and so isn't looking for a sexual partner. Faced with the decision, he says he's searching for a child to save from his men. On the one hand, it seems that he could have declared that his men not misuse the captives, but Julian spends a great deal of time seeking approval - even from those he commands - and probably couldn't bring himself to take that unpopular stand. On the other hand, Julian earns the loving gratitude of the young deaf-mute he rescues and claims to have formed an almost immediate bond with the youngster. Though some of Julian's statements of how the people loved him seem exaggerated, Priscus says that

the boy ran away upon Julian's death and was never seen again. It's a fact that indicates that he may very well have managed to walk the line between saving at least one of the captives and retaining the loyalty of his men.



## XXII

### XXII Summary

As the chapter opens, Julian is in his tent and says the deaf mute is sitting at his feet, playing a Persian instrument similar to a lute. Julian is having a disagreement with his generals. Though the military campaign to this point has been largely successful, the generals say they don't have sufficient troops to lay in for a serious siege. It was the general Salutius who suggested that they wait a week to see if reinforcements would arrive. Julian agrees, though he believes it to be nothing more than a dangerous delay. Julian's troops have been near the river, and all the military encounters have been there. Julian proposes to burn their ships. He says it's so that the troops won't be divided by the need to defend the ships. In truth, Julian believes it to be the only way to get his troops to willingly follow him into the interior to wage the next battle. Salutius warns Julian that the troops are singing a song with words that indicate they will soon be going home, but that Julian will not. Julian asks Salutius to "believe" in him, saying that he has information from the gods.

As he prepares for the coming battles, Julian says that no other Roman emperor has added so much territory to the empire. As it turns out, Julian saves twelve ships but burns the rest. The men transport those ships overland by wagon to be used to build bridges for the troops to return home. Priscus, who had accompanied Julian on this campaign, described the burning of the ships. He says Julian was forced to set fire to the first ship as no one else would do it. Priscus himself expresses some fear at this irreversible step. He says some of the officers openly grumble, but stop short of mutiny. The Persians, who have been doing battle with Julian's army for months, watch from the far side of the river. Priscus said it was never known what they thought of a Roman emperor destroying his own fleet. Julian is warned of another plot to kill him. According to the information, someone close to Julian would do the deed. Priscus says Julian asked if it was Priscus. He assured Julian it wasn't. Julian holds a meeting with his generals, including Victor, with them all questioning his plans. He reveals little but continues to question each of their suggestions. Julian says that he looks at Victor and knows for certain that he is behind the murder plot. The men encounter minor skirmishes and Julian (in his journal, at least) admits that he is lost. When the troops are only eight miles from the Tigris River, Julian is advised to accept a peace treaty with the Persians.

### XXII Analysis

Julian claims to have always known that Victor was behind the plot to kill him. With Julian now in a position of power - both politically and militarily - it's possible that he's more sympathetic to Constantius's own qualms about keeping Julian alive all those years ago. Julian never discusses it in that way, but he does remain aware that even those he trusts may be in on the plot. In his journal, he considers that even his friend,



Maximus, could be involved. As always, Julian bases all his decisions on signs and omens from the gods. At one point, he says that he believes the god of war has brought down the wrath of all the gods. Julian's reaction is that if he can't complete these battles, who will? It's not certain that Julian recognizes the difference in his thoughts and attitudes. He was once a loyal worshiper but now is angry that the deities seem to have abandoned him. Julian is outwardly confident, prompting confidence in his men. Priscus, who was there at the time, says that he had no idea Julian was wrestling with doubts during that time until he read the journal. It's notable that Julian wears the mantle of emperor as necessary, though he spent most of his early life detailing the reasons he doesn't want the power or the responsibility.



## XXIII

### XXIII Summary

The straps of Julian's armor broke and took several days to repair. Julian orders the troops to begin the eight-mile march to the Tigris River. Julian predicts that the Persians will harass the Roman army as the troops make their way to the river, but that there won't be a major assault. He's wrong and a series of attacks create a battle. Priscus tells the remainder of the story as there are no more journal entries by Julian. Julian and his household guard - a group of troops assigned to remain close to Julian's personal enclave - become involved with a fight. The Persians retreat, and Priscus says he could see Julian and Julian's servant, Callistus, chasing the retreating Persians. He says he briefly lost sight of the pair and when Julian returned to the site where Priscus and Maximus waited, they discovered that he'd been wounded. Priscus and Maximus were stunned when Julian was carried into his tent. Julian makes a grim joke, telling Maximus that the lesson to be learned is to never go into battle without armor. The spear had pierced Julian's side. Julian insists that it's minor, but the surgeons say there's nothing to be done and that Julian will soon die. Priscus says the fighting continued throughout the day and the Roman troops were merciless in avenging Julian. Julian claims not to have known how he was wounded and asked Callistus, who also claimed ignorance. Julian receives word throughout the battle that the Persians are being slaughtered, and Priscus says the news delights him.

As Julian wrestles with pain near the end of his life, he asks the name of the place. Maximus says they are at Phygia. Julian, remembering that his death was predicted to occur at Phygia, says that he knows the end is imminent. Julian brought out a speech he'd written to be delivered upon his death, and delivers it himself. Julian declines to name a successor. He says it's because he is afraid that by naming someone, he'll make a mistake. He says that if he names someone who isn't accepted, the others will simply kill him. After Julian dismissed the generals, he spends time with Priscus and Maximus. Just as he's about to die, he turned to his two friends as if he had something important to tell them. Then he sighed and died. When the surgeons removed the spear from Julian's side, Priscus determines that it is a Roman spear. He says that he stole Julian's private papers, including his memoirs, journal and his deathbed speech. The young deaf-mute ran from the tent and was never seen again, according to Priscus.

With some manipulation by Victor, Jovian was named emperor. Jovian immediately entered into a treaty with the Persians, giving up all that Julian had conquered and ceding some of the Roman lands as well. Jovian ruled only seven months. The next emperors shared rule of the empire, and one ordered Maximus killed for practicing magic. After Libanius contacted Priscus about his manuscript project, Priscus begins to wonder again about Julian's murderer. He tracks down Callistus, the only person he believes would know what truly happened to Julian. He find Callistus living in luxury, obviously very wealthy. At first, Callistus contends that there was no plot to kill Julian, that the Persian who had thrown the spear had obviously picked up the weapon from a



fallen Roman, and that he'd explained all that at the time of Julian's death. As Priscus insists that the story doesn't add up and insinuates that he knows something important, Callistus changes his tone. He asks Priscus how much Julian actually knew. Priscus says that Julian knew Victor was involved, and says that he was the person who killed Julian. Callistus tells all, including naming the officers involved - Victor, Arintheus, Jovian and Valentinian. Their first attempt was to make it appear that Julian had died of natural causes. Callistus didn't think poison would work because of Julian's sparse diet and good health. Callistus says he led Julian into the heat of the battle, knowing he had no armor and hoping that he would be killed by the Persians. Instead, those troops fled at the mere sight of Julian, so Callistus took the opportunity to kill Julian himself. Priscus silently questions whether Julian knew that Callistus had thrown the spear. Priscus predicts that Callistus has been quiet for twenty years and now wants to tell his story.

## XXIII Analysis

Priscus says he isn't certain whether the name of the place where Julian was killed was actually Phygia, or if Maximus, realizing the Julian was going to die, simply pulled that name because it had been predicted that Julian would die at Phygia. With the amount of faith that Julian put in signs and omens, he seems to have given up the will to live the moment Maximus told him they were at Phygia. With the amount of faith Maximus put in those same signs, it seems incredible that he didn't warn Julian of their location before the spear was thrown. Priscus wonders whether Julian knew that Callistus had thrown that fatal spear, though Callistus says that Julian thanked him for staying at his side during that final battle. This is the first real look at Callistus. He claims to have done the deed as a blow for Christianity. After all, Julian's open disdain for Christianity was no secret. Yet Priscus notes that Callistus was richly rewarded for his action. Twenty years had passed since Julian's death, and Priscus notes that Callistus seems to be tired of hiding the fact that he'd done such a noble deed.





## XXIV

### XXIV Summary

The final chapter is written by Libanius. Though he's worked at compiling the information needed to publish a manuscript about Julian, he receives a letter from the Augustus Theodosius. Theodosius forbids Libanius to publish the manuscript. Libanius had outlined the support of Bishop Meletius, but that bishop has died, leaving Libanius without the support needed to gain permission for the publication. However, Libanius is told that Theodosius has been told about Cimon, Libanius's illegitimate son, and that he's willing to grant legitimacy. Libanius then attends the funeral of the bishop where Cimon gets his first taste of the political power that will be his with the new ruling on his legitimacy. Libanius meets up with a former student, John, who preaches Christianity. The two have an argument on the subject before Libanius returns home. Once at home, Libanius laments the fact that he's not allowed to write the manuscript and predicts that his own life will soon end, much as a candle slowly fades before extinguishing.

### XXIV Analysis

There's little doubt that Libanius is crushed by the decision of the Augustus. Libanius begins the final chapter with a copy of his letter asking for that permission. It's extremely self-deprecating, and Libanius sings the praises of the Augustus, probably in an effort to gain his favor for the project. He then receives the reply withholding permission for publication, a reply that devastates Libanius. It's only then that Cimon is granted the legitimacy Libanius has sought for many years. Though the Augustus claims that the bishop told him of the request shortly before his death, it's likely that the Augustus is throwing Libanius a small favor to lessen sting of his refusal for publication. Libanius says that even the opportunity to be in public with Cimon recognized as his official son isn't enough to keep his disappointment at bay. Libanius recognizes the nearing end of his life, and seems exceptionally morose about the subject. His argument with John, his former student, indicates an intolerance that seems to have increased with the passage of time. Libanius ends his work by voicing his fear of death.



# Characters

## Julian the Apostate, later Julian Caesar and then Julian Aug

Julian was a small child when he was literally ripped from his home as his father was arrested. There's little doubt that this early encounter had an incredible impact on the person the man would become. His mother died at an early age, and he never saw his father again. Julian had one half-brother, and the two were never close. Soon after his brother became "Caesar," he was killed by the same man who killed Julian's father - Constantius Augustus, Julian's cousin. Julian is then named Caesar as Constantius has no other living male relatives. He has killed all his cousins (whom he fears will revolt to take the throne) and never had a child. Julian begins his life aiming to become a scholar. He is an astute student and works hard to please his teachers. As a young adult, he wants nothing more than to become a philosopher. Upon one visit from his cousin Constantius, Julian agrees to become a monk. It's not that he wants that, but that he's willing to do whatever it takes to remain alive. As a monk, he feels he won't be a threat to his cousin and is willing to give up what he wants to achieve that. However, a brief period of hiding in a monastery is as close as he comes to the priesthood.

Julian spends some time studying and calls that the happiest period of his life. He claims to be surprised later to discover that he has an aptitude for warfare and that he desires the power that comes with the political offices of the day. Julian excels on the battlefield, though it's less because of a talent for fighting than hours of study and practice. His brief marriage to his cousin - Constantius' sister - ends with her death. The couple are childless following miscarriages and the death of the only full-term baby. As Julian learns later, Constantius' own wife has called for the death of the child to ensure that Julian's son doesn't usurp her own tenuous position of authority. Julian's early teachings encourage him to believe in Christianity, but his own logical mind refuses to accept. He turns instead to the "gods" of mythology. He believes strongly in signs, trusts his dreams and puts much faith in the fact that those signs indicate that he'll eventually become Augustus, taking the place of his cousin. When the moment comes that his own soldiers insist that he take the title, "Augustus," he pretends neutrality. He verbally encourages loyalty but arranges the situation so that he is "forced" into acceptance. By this means, he appeases his own soldiers and insists to Constantius Augustus that he doesn't mean to revolt. Ironically, it's Constantius' sister and Julian's wife who offers the final push to encourage Julian to take that step. She recalled the death of her own child and told Julian it was the right thing. Julian prepared to fight Constantius for the title, but it was not to be. Constantius died before a battle between the two could occur.

## Constantius Augustus

Cousin to Julian, Constantius murdered both Julian's father and brother when he perceived them to be a threat to his throne. He ruled by fear and was constantly torn



regarding Julian's fate. There were times when he seemed ready to kill his young cousin to prevent Julian from someday seeking to take over the country, but he was fully aware that Julian was his last surviving relative. Constantius couldn't father children and some believed it was a curse brought on by the slaughter of so many of his close relatives. It was Constantius' own wife, Eusebius, who convinced Constantius that Julian posed no political threat. Constantius himself was the person who eventually convinced Julian that he did want the power a political office could provide, though it was by sheer accident. Julian, watching his cousin carefully, began to covet the power of the high political offices. Constantius worked to prevent Julian from building a significant army, and the two fully expected to eventually meet on the battlefield, though Constantius died before that conflict could occur. In most ways, Julian was far more popular than Constantius.

## Libanius and Priscus

The pair are apparently old friends, and the book is a compilation of Julian's words interrupted by observations of the two men, Libanius and Priscus. Both are elderly at the time of the writing and both knew Julian. Priscus was mentor, teacher and fellow soldier for Julian before he became Augustus. Libanius has decided that he would like to publish a book of Julian's memoirs and requests a copy of Julian's biography that has somehow come into Priscus' possession. Priscus agrees to have the manuscript copied for Libanius, but requests that his name not be associated with the finished work. He does, however, offer his own point of view throughout the book, sometimes clarifying Julian's words and other times correcting Julian's memory.

## Eusebia

Eusebia was Constantius' wife. Though she's early on a supporter of Julian, she later shows that she's also worried about her own position in the royalty. Eusebia never produces an heir and the blame is laid clearly at the feet of her husband. Nonetheless, Eusebia doesn't want Julian's wife, Helena to produce an heir. She paid a midwife to kill the only child Helena delivered alive by cutting the umbilical cord too short. While Julian never speaks badly of Eusebia, Helena eventually shifts her loyalty to Julian because of Eusebia's actions. Helena is a proper wife to Julian, but is much older. She died of a tumor in her stomach. Her final words to her husband were of the need for new tiles on her beloved villa.

## Helena

Wife of Julian and sister of Constantius, Helena and Julian were never close until near the end of her life. It's likely that Constantius made Helena Julian's wife in an effort to ensure that he'd know if Julian planned a revolt. It was Constantius' own wife, Eusebia, who finally pushed Helena to become loyal to Julian. Eusebia caused Helena to miscarry and paid a midwife to cause the death of the only child Helena delivered



alive. Literally on her deathbed, it was Helena who urged Julian to accept his soldier's demands that he become Augustus. Though Julian had never confided in Helena and was careful to never speak anything that could be termed treason in front of Helena, he did ask her advice when the soldiers were calling for his rise to power. It was only then that Helena told Julian of Eusebia's actions. She was much older than Julian and up to that point, it seems he had assumed her age was the reason she'd not delivered a healthy child.

## Callistus

Julian's bodyguard and the person ultimately responsible for Julian's death, we aren't introduced to this important character until near the end of the book. Priscus was on the battlefield at the time of Julian's death. He determines that the spear that pierced Julian's side was actually a Roman spear. Though Callistus insists that he did not see who threw the spear, Priscus knows that Callistus is the only person who might have seen it. As Priscus and Libanius begin to gather the information for Julian's biography, Priscus asks Callistus again about that fateful battle. Callistus says he threw the spear in an effort to protect Christianity from Julian's heathen ways. Callistus is wealthy, a direct result of payment for his action.

## Macrina

A woman intensely interested in philosophy, Macrina and Julian had an affair during Julian's stay in Athens. Seven months after his departure, Macrina gave birth to a son, rumored to be Julian's child. Nothing more is mentioned of either her or the child after Priscus' discussion of the rumors.

## Mardonis

Julian's early tutor, Mardonis was also teacher of Julian's mother and held Julian as his father was being taken to his death. It was Mardonis who instilled Julian's early education. After Julian and Mardonis parted, they met only one more time. Mardonis warned Julian then that he must be on his guard if he wanted to avoid being killed by Constantius.

## Faustia

Second wife of Constantius, Faustia bore Constantius one child - a daughter - but the child was born after Constantius' death. Julian meets with her once after the death of her husband, which exalted Julian to power in Rome. She tells Julian that she has no desire to be in power, and that she wants only to retire to the country. Julian admits to being relieved when the child is a daughter. Faustia isn't mentioned again.



## Jovian

Jovian is the man chosen by Victor to become emperor upon Julian's death. Victor wanted the position for himself, but knew the masses would never approve. Jovian ruled less than a year before his own death.



# Objects/Places

## Anatha

The first Persian city to fall to Julian's military campaign and the location at which Julian met the Roman soldier who'd been left behind sixty-six years earlier.

## Maiozamalcha

Near this city, Julian was ambushed during a scouting expedition. This is also where Julian takes in the deaf-mute who would serve him until Julian's death.

## Phygia

The location of Julian's death. His death had been predicted to occur on that location, and when it was evident that he was destined to die following a battle, Maximus declared that the battle had occurred at Phygia. Priscus said he was never certain whether that was truly the case or if Maximus had made it up to match the prophecy.

## Athens

A center of learning in the day and the place Julian spent forty-seven days among fellow students. Julian called his days in Athens the happiest of his life.

## Paris

A town on an island in the River Seine where Julian spent three winters early in his campaign to take Persia.

## Antioch

Home to Libanius and where Julian spent time as an adult.

## Ephesus

Considered an intellectual city of the day, Julian and his teacher Ecebolius travel to Ephesus to take advantage of the city life. Julian really wanted to go to Ephesus to meet Maximus. Though Ecebolius knew they were likely to see Maximus, he didn't object.



## **Persia**

A country bordering Rome and the object of Julian's military campaign. Julian was killed in Persia. Though he had taken a large amount of Persian land for the Roman empire, Julian's successor didn't hold the land.

## **Gaul**

A Roman province. Julian was first sent to protect Gaul from the invading Germans, though he was largely prevented from entering any major military campaigns. Julian states that, "When I left Gaul, the province was at peace."

## **The Sacred Palace**

The site of Julian's father's execution. His father was beheaded when Julian was only six-years-old. Julian describes visiting this place prior to his father's death.



# Themes

## Recognition of Shortcomings

Julian is well-educated as attested by the many tutors and teachers he studies under. But more importantly than the mere facts of knowledge, the education has prepared him to think analytically. That makes Julian more able to analyze situations that a lesser-education person might have. That doesn't mean that he's never blind to his own shortcomings. In fact, both Priscus and Libanius occasionally correct Julian's manuscript with their own take on situations and events. For example, Julian describes his decision to allow the troops to openly worship and sacrifice to the deities. In his version, he says the troops were anxious to take part. Priscus remembers that there was nearly a mutiny, that the people were upset and that Julian lost favor with some that day.

Julian begins his reign promising that everyone will have the freedom to worship as they please. But within a relatively short period of time, he's devising ways to force the Galileans to see things his way. When the temple of Apollo is burned, he demands that the Christian cathedral be closed. His justification was that if the followers of Apollo have no place to worship, the Christians should also be without a temple. It's ironic that Julian seems to seldom trust his own judgment without the approval of the various gods.

While Julian doesn't always recognize his own shortcomings, there are times when he sees himself as completely human and fallible. When Julian splashes water on his uncle and his friend, Oribius, they laugh at him. Yet Julian sees the act for what it might become. He recognizes that others have begun with minor pranks and jokes that were unkind but not serious. He attributed the seeming approval of others as the catalyst that caused some men to become more aggressive in their pranks until their actions were cruel and vicious. Julian had role models of that nature to follow. His brother watched wrestlers beat each other to death and had himself beaten one of Julian's grooms. Julian's uncle called for his death.

## Search for Truth of Religion

The search for what is true is seen throughout the book. Julian, his friends, his teachers and his military associates all seek out their own religious truths. In the end, Julian's own quest to eradicate Christianity is the reason his enemies use to kill him. Those in his position throughout the ages were constantly falling to murder plots, so it's at least possible that someone would have found some other reason to kill him had it not been for religious ideals. Julian himself is taught Christianity from an early age. In fact, when he is very young he is being groomed for a position with the priesthood. As time passes, it's Julian's education that leads him away from Christianity. He presents all the logical arguments he can as reasons Christianity can't be true. Ironically, Julian claims to have his own religious experiences with the deities and claims that those defy logical or even





written explanations. On the one hand, he opposes Christianity as there's nothing tangible that he can believe in, and because it goes against the writings of those he's studied, including Homer. On the other hand, he claims the religious experiences of his own are acceptable. Though he is not in favor of Christianity from an early age, he admits that he would have joined the priesthood had it been necessary to appease then Augustus Constantius. As Julian put it, a life as a priest was better than death as a prince.

Julian spends his life seeking the favor and the will of the various gods. As time passes, he seldom makes a decision without looking for signs and omens from those sources. Maximus plays heavily into Julian's superstitions, often offering messages he says he received from the gods themselves. However, Julian is selective in his interpretation of those signs. For example, he tells some of his plan to restore faith in his own religion, Hellenism. Several tell Julian that he won't succeed, but he refuses to take that as a truth. Whenever the signs go against Julian's own wishes, he either ignores them or seeks alternative interpretations.

## Coming of Age

Julian is the ultimate coming of age story. The book chronicles his life, beginning with his childhood and going through the battle that ends his life. He grows, changes, matures and ages, exhibiting many of the characteristics and trends of many young people. He goes through a period of rebelling against the authority, though his rebellion is somewhat tempered by the fact that his superiors could call for his death.

Julian's goals change dramatically over the course of his lifetime. He recognizes and accepts some of those changes, but seems oblivious to others. For example, Julian's first meeting with his cousin, the Augustus Constantius, leaves him in awe of that powerful position. Before that, he'd never believed that he would want to be in power. Suddenly, he has an up-close taste of what it would be like and he's no longer certain that he won't eventually want that for himself. His take on religion is different. He begins his reign in power being tolerant of those who worship differently. As is often true of young people with dreams, he believes his efforts at restoring Hellenism is moving too slowly. When he doesn't see the results he wanted, Julian begins to work at forcing the people to his way of thinking. His antagonism toward the Christians grows and becomes more open, exactly as a young ruler might do. Julian never recognizes this change in himself, or at least never acknowledges it.



# Style

## Point of View

The majority of the work is first person. Sections are from the point of view of Julian, though sections of the book are written from the point of view of Libanius and Priscus. None of the characters have an omniscient viewpoint, and all are limited by their own view and interpretation of the happenings. There is sufficient dialog to create a better look at many of the characters. There are many descriptions of places, people and events, all told in first person by one or another of the main three characters. In some places, one contradicts the other, indicating the the facts of the accounts are based solely on the memories of the authors.

## Setting

The book begins in Antioch in 380 A.D. The main character travels over several areas of Rome during his rise to power. He discusses at length the cities of Athens, Constantinople, Paris, Milan and others. The time frame is that of dramatic change. Men are studying and a love of philosophy and the arts is becoming widespread. With that knowledge, there's careful consideration of religion. The fact that Jesus lived only a short time prior to Julian's reign means the people are still at odds as to his true identity. The land is rife with conflict and potential conflict. The Germans are eager to add to their own nation, and battles over territories are common. Meanwhile, the people themselves are at constant war. Secrets seldom remain secret and an ill-advised word can prompt a death sentence. While contacting the oracles, wise men and soothsayers of the day about anything political was prohibited, it was done and Julian relied heavily on the messages from those fronts. Even a person who admitted to having a dream about the death or overthrow of the reigning Augustus could find himself put to death. The intrigue included a midwife, paid to kill the only legitimate child fathered by Julian. The eunuchs were a social order unto themselves, and guarded their places in the palace and royal life jealously. Julian's death reportedly ends in Phygia, though there is some question as to the truth of that. An early omen indicated that would be the place of his death, and the person who gave Julian that information determined that Julian's final battle was fought on that ground.

## Language and Meaning

The language is modern English. Though the authors refer to various languages - Greek and Latin, for example - the entire work is presented in

English. There prose flows well and is easy to read. Though the story line may be somewhat dry in the beginning, the reader is quickly caught up in the main storyline - the life of Julian as he moves from child to ruler of the Roman Empire. There are some tedious descriptions, particularly of places and buildings in Athens. The majority of the



battle details have been omitted with only brief descriptions of those events. Julian makes notes to include them as part of his memoir, but doesn't go into detail in the writing itself.

Dialog is plentiful and reflects the personalities of those speaking. However, it's important to remember that these "quotes" are written from the memories of Julian, Libanius and Priscus, in many cases many years after the events. Therefore, some may be questionable.

## Structure

The book is divided into three sections - Youth, Caesar and Augustus. Each section is divided into chapters for a total of twenty-four chapters. Fittingly, each chapter is titled only by Roman numeral. The chapters range generally near twenty pages, except the final chapter which consists of Libanius's narrative regarding the publication of the manuscript. Each chapter is broken into sections headed with the name of the writer. In this way, the author keeps the reader on track so that it's easy to move from one thought to another. In many cases, Julian's own memoirs are interrupted by Priscus or Libanius who recall additional events or details that should be included or impose their own take on a particular comment by Julian.

The book's main plot may be described as the life of Julian Augustus, but is more accurately described as an effort to publish a book on Julian's life. Libanius, former teacher of Julian, plans to write a manuscript and seeks out the help of Priscus, who spent time with Julian in the fields. As it turns out, Priscus has Julian's private papers and some vital information. The book begins with letters between the two men. Additional letters, as well as comments on Julian's writings, are interspersed throughout the book.

With the various facets of Julian's life covered, there are bound to be sections of the book to delight any reader and sections that are uninteresting. From his study of religion to military battles, descriptions of Athens to debates with friends and teachers, the author covers a range of human encounters that could very well have happened during Julian's life.



## Quotes

"Julian is much admired to this day, though not for his philosophy. Julia is admired because he was young and handsome and the most successful general of our century."

— Priscus Chapter 1, Page 7

"You're no loss, you little ape! But why do I have to die?"

— Gallus, brother of Julian

Chapter 3, Page 31

"But I should like to be a philosopher or a rhetorician. Apparently, I have no gift for soldiering."

— Julian

Chapter 4, Page 49

"My only plot is how to survive."

— Julian

Chapter 5, Page 81

"Don't you realize - can't you tell just by looking at me, my dear wise old Priscus - that not a day has passed in twenty years I haven't wished I were dead?"

— Macrina

Chapter 7, Page 157

"I wanted to reach out and take his hand and tell him not to fear me, but I did not dare. Neither of us was ever able to face the other."

— Julian

Chapter 9, Page 193

"Well, how do you measure this on your scales? Two children here." She held up her left hand. "Eusebia here." She held up her right hand and made the scales even."

— Helena upon telling Julian that Eusebia had murdered their children.

Chapter 12, Page 235

"Every prophecy is always open to interpretation and if it turns out that its meaning was other than what one thought, it is not the fault of the gods, but of us who have misinterpreted their signs."

— Julian

Chapter 14, Page 270

"All paid me silent homage for I had, miraculously, with the stopping of one man's breath, become sole Augustus, Emperor of Rome, Lord of the world. To my astonishment, I wept."



— Julian  
Chapter 15, Page 287

"Since no one can know the future, it is quite easy to pick the wrong side."  
— Priscus Chapter 16, Page 293.

"So at the end he was neither a god nor event the Jewish messiah but a rebel who tried to make himself king of the Jews. Quite correctly, our governor executed him."  
— Julian Chapter 17, Page 332

"Either the line is clearly drawn between the gods of Homer on the one hand and the followers of the dead Jew on the other, or we shall be quite absorbed in the general atheism of the day."  
— Julian Chapter 18, Page 362

"Heroes must see to their own fame. No one else will."  
— Libanius Chapter 19, Page 391



## Topics for Discussion

What were Julian's early goals? How did those aspirations change over the course of his lifetime and why?

Describe Julian's relationship with his brother. At one point, Julian attributes Gallus' bad behavior to the influence of his wife. What does that say about Julian's feelings for Gallus?

What prompts the actions of Eusebia? What impact does that have on Julian and his wife, Helena?

How did Julian go about his efforts to quash Christianity in favor of worship of the deities? How did his actions on this issue change over the course of his reign?

What are some of the signs and omens Julian receives that indicate he'll become emperor of Rome? How much stock does he put in those signs?

How does Julian die? What was the fate of the person who killed him? Describe Julian's final hours and his decision not to name an heir to the throne.

What changes does Julian make in the royal court and at the palace once he's named ruler? How do those changes impact the operation of the court?

When Julian is in Athens as a student, his identity is known but he is still allowed to study with the general student body. What does Julian say about that period? What is it about his time at Athens that Julian recalls so fondly?

Describe at least five times when Julian consults the deities for signs of what he is to do next. Why does Julian put such faith in these signs and omens? What sign foretells of Julian's death and how is that borne out over time?