

The Persian War

Greece was not alone in the ancient world. Egypt was flourishing. Other civilizations were developing around the Mediterranean. One of the largest and most powerful was the Persian Empire.

The Greek world was tiny. It covered a small area at the southern tip of the Greek peninsula. The Persian Empire was huge. It stretched from the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the Indus River Valley.

Remember all those towns the ancient Greeks built in early times? Some were still flourishing. The Greek towns located along the Turkish coast had fallen under Persian rule. The Greek colonists were unhappy about it.

Athens sent supplies to help them out. Those supplies included weapons. Persia would have noticed the Greeks sooner or later, but this activity most definitely caught their eye.

The Persian army had no doubt that the Greeks would be easy to conquer. The Greeks were outnumbered - what chance would they have? The Persians laughed at the thought of the battle ahead.

What the Persians forgot, or perhaps they just did not know, was that the Greeks were incredible warriors. Athens had a highly capable navy, with ships that were tiny and easy to maneuver. The Spartan army was terrifying.

The Persians came three times, and fought three huge battles - Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis. Each time the Persians were convinced they could easily conquer the Greeks. Each time, the Greeks drove them away.

Xerxes, the Persian King, was furious at the result of the first two battles with the now hated Greeks. For the third major battle, the Battle of Salamis, he sent an incredible number of Persian ships to wage war on Greece. He didn't want just to win. He wanted Greece to be totally destroyed.

Xerxes (nicknamed "Xerx the Jerk" by some of our students) was so confident of success that he had his slaves carry a golden throne from Persia, and set it up on a hillside overlooking the Greek harbor, so he could be comfortable while he watched the Greeks die.

But the Greeks did not die. Their small ships could maneuver better. The Greeks were able to toss burning wood aboard the Persian ships and get safely away. The Persians had to abandon their burning ships. Those Persian sailors who made it to land were greeted by the Spartan army. The Spartans killed them all.

When Xerxes saw how the battle was going, he ran away and left his army behind. While Athens burned the Persian ships, Sparta left some men on the beach to handle any Persians who made it to shore. The rest of the Sparta army marched north and defeated the Persian army coming in from that direction.

The Greeks took the day. The few Persians who survived fled. But there was always the threat that the Persians might come back. In preparation, Athens created the Delian League - a group that would allow them to quickly prepare for war, should the need arise.

Source: <http://greece.mrdonn.org/persianwars.html>

Questions for Homework: Answer in complete sentences on a separate piece of paper.

1. Who owned more land, Greece or Persia? Why?
2. What was the first thing the Greeks did to make the Persians angry?
3. What part of Athens' military was the strongest?
4. Why were the Persians so confident that they would win?
5. What strategy did the Greeks use to win at the Battle of Salamis?
6. Why did Athens create the Delian League at the end of the war?