

XERXES

Xerxes immediately had to sequester revolts and rebellions erupting in Egypt and Babylon upon assuming kingship. One of his major aims was to conquer the mainland Greeks and force them to acknowledge Persian dominion. He managed to capture the city of Athens in 480 BC (Battle of Thermopylae) but was defeated by the Greek's naval league at the Battle of Salamis.



Thermopylae: Xerxes amassed a large army, intending to conquer the entire mainland of Greece. It was suggested by an Athenian general (Themistocles), that the Greeks ought to obstruct the Persians by blocking army entry at the Thermopylae pass and navy entry at the Straits of Artemisia. The Greeks held the Persians off for two days, until they were betrayed by a local resident. He revealed to the Persians an alternative path which provided an advantage over the Greek armies. Inevitably, the Greek armies were defeated at Thermopylae.

Battle of Salamis:

After the defeat at Thermopylae, the Greeks provoked the Persian navy into battle at Salamis, hoping a victory would prevent any further action in Peloponnesus. The Persians tried to strategically block the Greeks into the Straits of Salamis at both ends. Unfortunately for the Persians, their vast numbers hindered them in these cramped conditions.



This erupted in chaos and disorganization for the Persians, giving the Greeks a clear advantage. The Greeks took the opportunity and defeated the Persians at Salamis. Xerxes continued in his attempts to conquer Greece at the Battles of Plataea and Mycale, but were likewise defeated.

The Battle of Salamis is believed to be one of the most significant battles in human history- paving the way for a Greco-Western History. In 465 BC, Xerxes was murdered in a coup, believed to be orchestrated by his son Artaxexes.

IN THE BIBLE...

Xerxes is believed to be the king discussed in the book of Esther. Xerxes issued an edict to gather a group of women who were taken into his harem and prepared by eunuchs. Esther, Hebrew name Hadassah, found favor with the lead eunuch and later with King Xerxes. Using this favor, Esther convinced the King to halt a plot against the Hebrews by the King's assistant, Haman. This plot historically referred to the earlier disobedience of King Saul, in the book of Samuel.



ARTAXERXES

His rule was generally peaceful, interrupted only by insurrections: the revolt of his brother (satrap of Bactria) and the rebellion of Egypt with assistance from the Athenians. Megabyzus (satrap of Syria) restored the Persian rule over Egypt. He, like his predecessors, remained neutral and tolerant toward multiculturalism and religion (as long as Persian dominion was not threatened).

Artaxerxes was succeeded by seven kings who ruled before Persia was conquered by Alexander the Great, whilst under the rule of Darius III, final king of the Achmenid Empire.



IN THE BIBLE...

The prophet Nehemiah was cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He wished to return to Jerusalem, to aid in rebuilding the temple and to initiate a wall to protect the temple. The King not only permitted Nehemiah to depart, but also provided supplies and protection over his journey.

And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. Nehemiah 2:5-6

The Achaemenid Persians



KINGS LIST

559-530 BC	CYRUS THE GREAT
530-522 BC	CAMBYSES II
522 BC	BARDIYA
521-486 BC	DARIUS I (THE GREAT)
486-465 BC	XERXES I
465-425 BC	ARTAXERXES I
425-424 BC	XERXES II
424 BC	SOGDIANUS
424-405 BC	DARIUS II
405-359 BC	ARTAXERXES II
359-338 BC	ARTAXERXES III
338-336 BC	ARTAXERXES IV
336-330 BC	DARIUS III

This brochure will focus on major kings in the Achaemenid Empire, especially those which are referenced in Scripture.

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CYRUS THE GREAT

Originally known as “King of Anshan”, an area of Persia. The Persians were one of the many vassals of the Median Empire. Cyrus led an attack against King Astyages (of the Medes). This victory enabled Cyrus to spread his kingdom, overtaking Lydia, Ionia, Sardis, and Babylon.



Cyrus was considered a savior to many; his rule overthrew the Babylonian empire. Unlike his predecessors, the Babylonians and Assyrians- he offered freedom to his captors. He demanded kingdom allegiance, but allowed former slaves to return to their home countries and practice their religions freely.

His empire was the first which encouraged multiculturalism. Cyrus died while fighting against the Massagetae in 530 BC.

IN THE BIBLE...

Cyrus allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, and decreed that they must rebuild the temple. Furthermore, he assisted in funding the project- paying the carpenters, nourishment, oil, and building materials from his treasury.



Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem.

DANIEL: The Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonians) were conquered by the Persians, via Cyrus the Great. The kingdom divided its rule under 120 satraps and 3 governs over them. David was one of the governors. Other officials became jealous of Daniel, and plotted against him. They approached the King of Persia and bequeathed him to create a new law dictating that no god should be worshipped apart from himself for 30 days. The king conceded to this idea**.

Daniel was reported to be worshipping another god, Jehovah, during this 30 day period. The King reluctantly sentenced Daniel to a night in the lions den. While in the den, Daniel’s God intervened, and Daniel survived. The King, full of approbation and thankfulness, praised Daniel’s God for saving him.

Daniel 6:26-27: I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.

***Scripture calls the king Darius, but this is believed to be Cyrus the Great. Some scholars contend it was Gobryas, a general who defected from Nebuchadnezzar to Cyrus was became a satrap.*

CAMBYSES

The son of Cyrus the Great, he succeeded Cyrus’ throne. His preeminent achievement was conquering Egypt in 525 BC. He had himself crowned as the next Pharaoh of Egypt according to their rituals; his Pharaonic name was Mesuti-Re. A rumor was spread (by the next King, Darius) that Cambyses arranged the death of his brother, Bardiya. Cambyses died in 522 BC, in Egypt.



DARIUS THE GREAT

Darius, the governor of Parthia, solicited the support of six Persian nobles and took the throne. He justified his kingdom, claiming he shared genealogy with the progenitor called Achaemenes, from whom Cyrus II also descended. The Persian nomenclature “Achaemenid” represented this period of their history due to this genealogical descension. Two great battles between the Greeks and Persians commenced under Darius’ rule:



The Ionian Revolt and the Battle of Marathon.

Ionian Revolt: Aristagorus, ruler of Miletus, persuaded Darius to add the Isle of Naxos to his empire. He created a force of levies from the Ionian coast for this purpose, but instead turned against Darius and convinced other neighboring cities to join the revolt. This revolt lasted for years and was supported by ships from Athenian Greece. Eventually, the Persians managed to re-acquisition the lost rebellious cities into their empire.

Battle of Marathon: Majorly a punitive response for the Athenian involvement in the Ionian Revolt, Darius sent an expedition led by general Datis against Athens. Datis landed his convoy at Marathon, where the Greeks were ready for battle. Datis tried to employ strategic maneuvering against the Greeks by taking some of his men back into the ships to sail around the back of the Greeks’ army. The Greeks pre-empted this attack and the Persians lost. It would be up to Xerxes to lead further battles against the Greeks, since Darius died in 485 BC.

IN THE BIBLE...

EZRA: Under the guidance of Zerubbabel, the people of God were implored to resume the temple restoration. Adversaries of the Jews requested to assist in rebuilding the temple. Zerubbabel and the Jews declined. The adversaries did what they could to frustrate the Jews’ work, even reporting it to King Darius**, highlighting the city they were building near the temple. This resulted in a brief cessation of all building activity. This Jews did not work at restoring the temple again until the second year of Darius’ reign.

Zerubbabel, once again, incited the people to resume in the temple restoration. Their actions were reported to King Darius, indicating that the Jews had claimed a former decree from Cyrus had allowed them to do this work. King Darius decreed a search of the archives, and found their claims to be true. Darius reiterated this decree, and added onto it with taxes from the region beyond the River. Furthermore, he proclaimed a “curse” on anyone who may stand as an obstacle to the temple’s completion:

Ezra 6:11... Also I issue a decree that whoever alters this edict, let a timber be pulled from his house ...

*** Scripture calls the king Artaxerxes. This is believed to be Darius, but there is scholarly debate about possible alternatives.*