

# Section

# 3

# Persia Attacks the Greeks

## Guide to Reading

### Looking Back, Looking Ahead

Section 2 explained how Greeks built strong but separate city-states. At the same time far to the east, the Persians were building a powerful empire. It was only a matter of time before Persia would try to invade Greece.

### Focusing on the Main Ideas

- The Persian Empire united a wide area under a single government. (page 352)
- Both Sparta and Athens played roles in defeating the Persians. (page 354)

### Locating Places

**Persia** (PUHR•zhuh)  
**Marathon** (MAR•uh•THAHN)  
**Thermopylae**  
 (thuhr•MAH•puh•lee)  
**Salamis** (SA•luh•muhs)  
**Plataea** (pluh•TEE•uh)

### Meeting People

**Cyrus the Great** (SY•ruhs)  
**Darius** (duh•RY•uhs)  
**Xerxes** (ZUHRK•SEEZ)  
**Themistocles**  
 (thu•MIHS•tuh•KLEEZ)

### Content Vocabulary

**satrapies** (SAY•truh•peeZ)  
**satrap** (SAY•TRAP)  
**Zoroastrianism** (ZOHR•uh•WAS•tree•uh•NIH•zuhm)

### Academic Vocabulary

**vision** (VIH•zhuhn)  
**internal** (ihn•TUHR•nuhl)

### Reading Strategy

**Organizing Information** Create a chart like the one below to list the accomplishments of Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes.

Ruler	Accomplishments



### History Social Science Standards

**WH6.4** Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the early civilizations of Ancient Greece.



## Who & When?



**660 B.C.**  
 Zoroaster born

**650 B.C.**



**559 B.C.**  
 Cyrus becomes ruler of Persia

**550 B.C.**



**480 B.C.**  
 Xerxes invades Greece

**450 B.C.**



# The Persian Empire

**Main Idea** The Persian Empire united a wide area under a single government.

**Reading Connection** Have you ever seen soldiers marching through city streets on the news? Imagine the same thing happening in Asia in the 500s B.C. Read to learn what happened as Persian armies marched westward from Asia.

The people of **Persia** (PUHR•zhuh) lived in what is today southwestern Iran. Early Persians were warriors and nomads who herded cattle. For a time, they were dominated by others. Then one remarkable leader, **Cyrus the Great** (SY•ruhs), managed

to unite the Persians into a powerful kingdom. Under Cyrus, who ruled from 559 B.C. to 530 B.C., Persia began building an empire larger than any yet seen in the world.

**The Rise of the Persian Empire** In 539 B.C. Cyrus's armies swept into Mesopotamia and captured Babylon. Then they took over northern Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, Canaan, and the Phoenician cities. Cyrus treated all his new subjects well. As you read in Chapter 3, he allowed the captive Jews in Babylon to return home. Cyrus's merciful rule helped hold his growing empire together.



◀ Bronze model of Persian chariot



The leaders who followed Cyrus continued to add to Persian territory. They conquered Egypt, western India, and Thrace, a region northeast of Greece. From one end to the other, the Persian Empire was about the size of the continental United States today.

To connect their vast holdings, the Persians built miles of roads. The Royal Road stretched from Asia Minor to Susa, the Persian capital. Along the way, the Persians set up roadside stations to supply food, shelter, and fresh horses to the king's messengers.

**What Was Persian Government Like?** As the Persian Empire grew bigger, it became very difficult to manage. When **Darius** (duh•RY•uhs) came to the throne in 521 B.C., he reorganized the government to make it work better.

Darius divided the empire into 20 states called **satrapies** (SAY•truh•peez). Each was ruled by an official with the title of **satrap** (SAY•TRAP), meaning “protector of the kingdom.” The satrap acted as tax collector, judge, chief of police, and head recruiter for the Persian army. However, all the satraps answered to the Persian king.

The king's power depended upon his troops. By the time of Darius, Persia had a large army of professional soldiers. Unlike the Greek city-states, where the citizens took up arms in times of war, in Persia the government paid people to be full-time soldiers. Among them were 10,000 specially trained soldiers who guarded the king. They were called the Immortals because when a member died, he was immediately replaced.

**The Persian Religion** The Persian religion was called **Zoroastrianism** (ZOHR•uh•WAS•tree•uh•NIH•zuhm). Its founder, Zoroaster,

was born in 660 B.C. He began preaching after seeing **visions** as a young man.

Like the Jews, Zoroaster believed in one god. He viewed this supreme being as the creator of all things and a force of goodness. However, Zoroaster recognized evil in the world, too. He taught that humans had the freedom to choose between right and wrong, and that goodness would triumph in the end. The Persians practiced Zoroastrianism for centuries, and it still has a small number of followers today.

**Reading Check Explain** What did Darius do to make his government work better?

## King Darius

Darius helped to organize the Persian government.  
*What methods did he use?*





## The Persian Wars

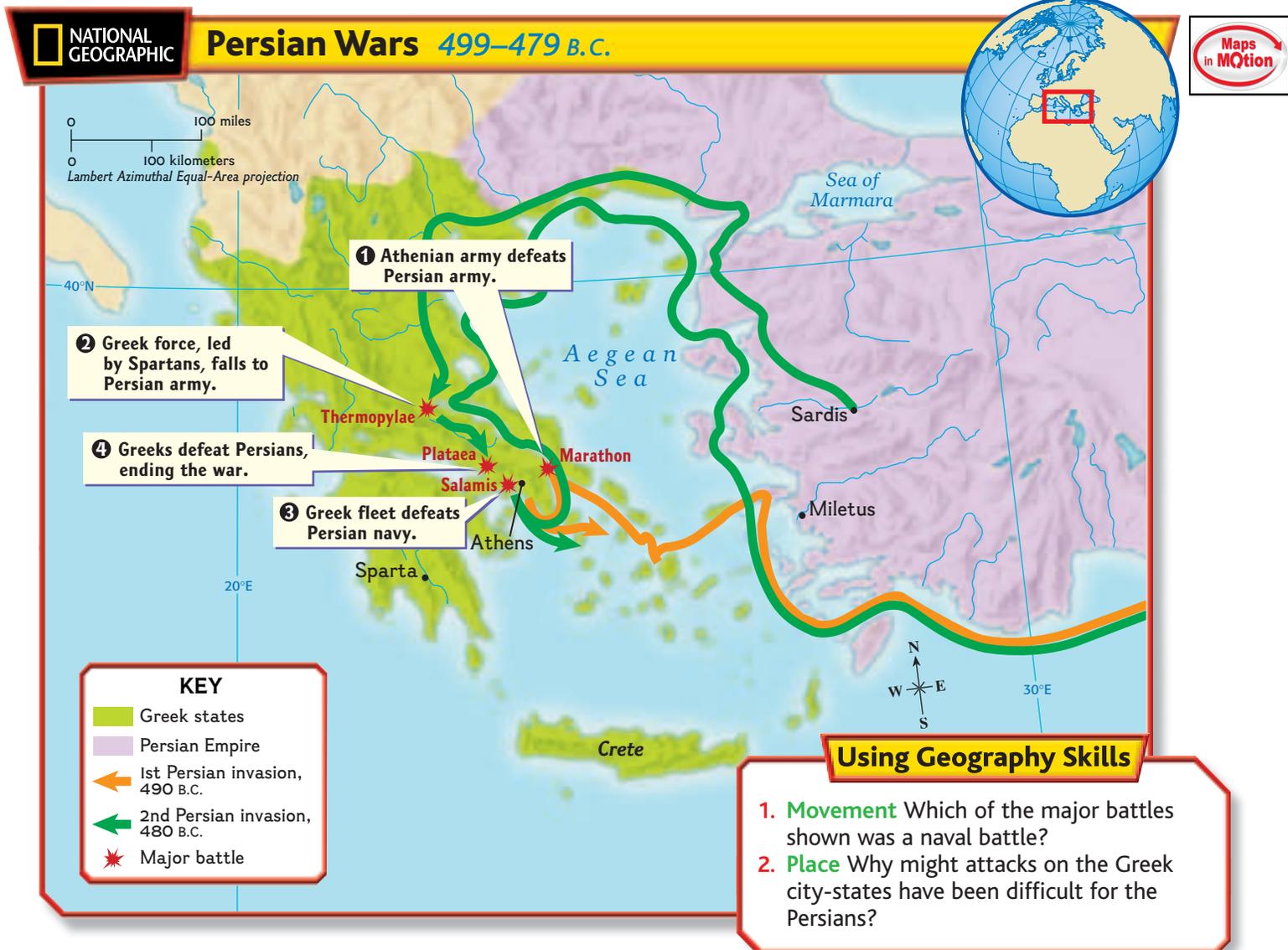
**Main Idea** Both Sparta and Athens played roles in defeating the Persians.

**Reading Connection** Have you and a rival ever set aside your differences to work for a common cause? This happened in ancient Greece when Sparta and Athens came together to fight the Persians. Read about the outcome.

As the Greeks set up colonies in the Mediterranean area, they often clashed with the Persians. By the mid-500s B.C., Persia already controlled the Greek cities in Asia Minor. In 499 B.C. the Athenian army helped the Greeks in Asia Minor rebel

against their Persian rulers. The rebellion failed, but King Darius decided the mainland Greeks had to be stopped from interfering in the Persian Empire.

**The Battle of Marathon** In 490 B.C. a Persian fleet landed 20,000 soldiers on the plain of **Marathon** (MAR•uh•THAHN), only a short distance from Athens. For several days, the Persians waited there for the Athenians to advance. The Athenians, however, did not take the bait. They had only 10,000 soldiers compared to the Persians' 20,000. They knew that attacking was too dangerous. Instead they held back in the hills overlooking the plain.



Tired of waiting, the Persian commander decided to sail south and attack Athens directly. He ordered his troops back onto the ships, and it was then that he made a big mistake. The first to board, he decided, would be the horsemen in the cavalry, the strongest part of the Persian army.

As soon as the cavalry was out of fighting range, the Greeks charged down from the hills and onto the plain of Marathon. They caught the Persian foot soldiers standing in the water, waiting their turn to board the ships. Unable to defend themselves, the Persians were easily defeated.

According to legend, the Athenians sent a messenger named Pheidippides (fy•DIHP•uh•DEEZ) home with the news. The runner raced nearly 25 miles (40.2 km) from Marathon to Athens. He collapsed from exhaustion and, with his last breath, announced, "Victory." Then he died. Modern marathon races are named for this famous run and are just over 26 miles long.

**Another Persian Strike** After Darius died in 486 B.C., his son **Xerxes** (ZUHRK•SEEZ) became the Persian king. Xerxes vowed revenge against the Athenians. In 480 B.C. he launched a new invasion of Greece, this time with about 180,000 troops and thousands of warships and supply vessels.

To defend themselves, the Greeks joined forces. Sparta sent the most soldiers, and their king, Leonidas (lee•AH•nuh•duhs), served as commander. Athens provided the navy. An Athenian general, **Themistocles** (thuh•MIHS•tuh•KLEEZ), created a plan to fight the Persians.

The Greeks knew that as the huge Persian army marched south, it depended on shipments of food brought in by boat. Themistocles argued that the Greeks' best strategy would be to attack the Persians' ships and cut off food supplies to the army.

## Primary Source

### Herodotus's History



▲ Herodotus reading to a crowd

The Greek historian Herodotus (huh•RAH•duh•tuhs) wrote *History of the Persian Wars*. This is thought to be the first real history in Western civilization. Herodotus described the conflict between the Greeks and Persians as one between freedom and dictatorship. Here he tells of Xerxes' address to Persian nobles: "And truly I have pondered upon this, until at last I have found out a way whereby we may at once win glory, and likewise get possession of a land which is as large and as rich as our own . . . while at the same time we obtain satisfaction and revenge . . . My intent is to . . . march an army through Europe against Greece, that thereby I may obtain vengeance from the Athenians for the wrongs committed by them against the Persians and against my father."

—Herodotus,  
*The Persian Wars*, Book VII

### DBQ Document-Based Question

What reasons besides revenge does Xerxes have for invading Greece?



To ready their fleet for battle, the Greeks needed to stall the Persian army before it reached Athens. The Greeks decided the best place to block the Persians was at **Thermopylae** (thuhr•MAH•puh•lee). Thermopylae was a narrow pass through the mountains that was easy to defend. About 7,000 Greek soldiers held off the Persians there for two days. The Spartans in the Greek army were especially brave. As one story has it, the Greeks heard that Persian arrows would darken the sky. A Spartan warrior responded, "That is good news. We will fight in the shade!"

Unfortunately for the Greeks, a traitor exposed a mountain path to the Persians that led them around the Greeks. As the Persians mounted a rear attack, King Leonidas sent most of his troops to safety. He and several hundred others, however,

stayed behind and fought to the death. The Greeks lost the battle at Thermopylae, but their valiant stand gave Athens enough time to assemble 200 ships.

The Greek fleet attacked the Persian fleet in the strait of **Salamis** (SA•luh•muhs), not far from Athens. A strait is a narrow strip of water between two pieces of land. The Greeks expected to have the upper hand in the battle because their ships could maneuver well in tight spaces. Greek ships were smaller, faster, and easier to steer than the big Persian ships, which became easy targets.

The Greek plan worked. After a ferocious battle, the Greeks destroyed almost the entire Persian fleet. Still, the Persian army marched on. When their troops reached Athens, the Greeks had already fled.

The Persians burned the city. This only stiffened the resolve of the Greek city-states.

## Battle of Salamis

At the Battle of Salamis, smaller, faster Greek ships defeated the Persian fleet. **Near what Greek city-state was the strait of Salamis located?**





In early 479 B.C., they came together to form the largest Greek army ever assembled. With solid body armor, longer spears, and better training, the Greek army crushed the Persian army at **Plataea** (pluh•TEE•uh), northwest of Athens.

The battle was a turning point for the Greeks, convincing the Persians to retreat to Asia Minor. By working together, the Greek city-states had saved their homeland from invasion.

### What Caused the Persian Empire to Fall?

When the Greeks defeated the Persian army, they helped to weaken it. The empire was already affected by **internal** problems. As these problems worsened, the empire would gradually lose its strength.

Persia remained intact for almost 150 more years. However, after Darius and Xerxes, other Persian rulers raised taxes to gain more wealth. They spent the gold and silver that flowed into the treasuries on luxuries for the royal court.

The high taxes angered their subjects and caused many rebellions. At the same time, the Persian royal family fought over who was to be king. Many of the later Persian kings were killed by other family members who wanted the throne.

Persian kings had many wives and children. The sons had little, if any, power so they were constantly plotting to take over the throne. As a result of such plots, six of the nine rulers after Darius were murdered.

All of these problems made Persia vulnerable to attack. By the time a young Greek conqueror named Alexander invaded the empire in 334 B.C., the Persians were no match for his troops.

By 330 B.C., the last Persian king was dead and Alexander ruled over all his lands. You will learn more about Alexander the Great and his many achievements in Chapter 8.

**Reading Check Cause and Effect** What led to the Persian Wars?

## Section 3 Review

**History Online**  
**Study Central** Need help understanding Persia or the Persian wars? Visit [ca.hss.glencoe.com](http://ca.hss.glencoe.com) and click on Study Central.

### Reading Summary

#### Review the Main Ideas

- The Persian Empire united its many lands under a single government.
- The Persian Empire attacked Greece several times. Despite their rivalry, Athens and Sparta joined forces to defeat the Persians.

### What Did You Learn?

1. Why was Cyrus considered a fair ruler?
2. What was the Royal Road?
4. **The Big Ideas** Imagine you are an adviser to Xerxes and are alarmed about his plan for revenge on Greece. Compose a letter to him listing possible outcomes of the war.

### Critical Thinking

3. **Summarize** Draw a table like the one below. Then summarize what happened at each battle in the Persian Wars. **CA 6RC2.4**

Battle	Action
Marathon	
Thermopylae	
Salamis	
Plataea	

**CA 6WS1.1; 6WA2.5**

5. **Analysis Determining Context** Reread the Primary Source quote on page 355. Does it matter that the quote comes from a Greek? Write an essay discussing different ways the quote can be interpreted.

**CA HR5.**

