



The Persian Empire

The first Persian Empire, also called the Achaemenid Empire, came into power in the Middle East after the fall of the Babylonian Empire. It was founded by Cyrus the Great, who conquered the Median Empire in 550 BC before conquering the Lydians and the Babylonians. Later kings expanded the empire to include Mesopotamia, Egypt, Israel, and Turkey, spanning over 3,000 miles from east to west. The Persian Empire was the largest empire in the world during its time. In contrast to other empires, like the Assyrians, the Persians allowed the civilizations they conquered to keep their lives, customs, and cultures, provided they paid taxes to the Persians and obeyed Persian rule.

The Persian Empire was divided into regions called satraps. Each satrap had its own ruler who answered to the Persian King, enforced the king's laws, and collected taxes. Roads ran between satraps, and the Persians also had a postal system. The Royal Road, built by King Darius the Great, spanned the 1,700 miles between Sardis in Turkey to Suza in Elam.

King Darius tried to conquer the Greeks in 490 BC, but he was defeated while trying to take the city of Athens at the Battle of Marathon. His son, Xerxes I, assembled thousands of warriors in 480 BC to face off against the Greeks again. Though he won the Battle of Thermopylae against a small army from Sparta, his navy was vanquished by the Greek fleet at the Battle of Salamis. The Persian Empire was eventually conquered by the Greeks, led by Alexander the Great, in 334 BC.

How did the Persian Empire differ from other empires of the time?