

## The Persians

The Persian Empire was located east of the Fertile Crescent on the east side of the Persian Gulf. It was the largest empire the ancient world had known. Persia occupied land that is presently Iran and Afghanistan. Persians were not Semitic as many of the early civilizations in that part of the world had been. They were Indo-European and called themselves **Aryans**. The name Iran is based on the name Aryan.

The Persians and the Medes came to this area about 1300 B.C. The Medes were warriors who raided cities and caravans. In 550 B.C., Cyrus the Great, a Persian province ruler, led an army to defeat the Medes. Cyrus united the Medes and the Persians into a strong army to expand his kingdom.

Cyrus and his army were very successful. In only 15 years, his army of archers and cavalrymen conquered almost all of the ancient world. This included Asia Minor, the Fertile Crescent, the Indus Valley, and Egypt. The Persians treated those they defeated fairly and kindly. In fact, there is some evidence that when the Babylonians were defeated by the Persians, many Babylonians welcomed the Persians because they were unhappy with their own king. Cyrus freed the Jewish captives and led them back to Jerusalem. The Persians allowed the kingdoms they defeated to maintain their own cultures rather than to impose the Persian culture on them. Conquered people did, however, have to pay tribute to Persia. Cyrus was killed in battle in 530 B.C.

The Persian Empire gained prominence under the leadership of Darius I, who ruled from 522 B.C. to 486 B.C. The kingdom thrived. One of the qualities that made Darius a great leader was that he was a very good administrator and organizer. Since the Persian Empire was so large, the challenge was to maintain the lands it had acquired and to govern them. Darius divided this enormous empire into 20 provinces called **satrapies**. Each of these satrapies was managed by a governor called a **satrap**. Other leaders, such as judges and tax collectors, were Persians appointed by the emperor. The emperor also had an inspector who would visit the satrapies unannounced to make sure the officials were doing their jobs well and being loyal to the emperor. The Persians connected their empire with well-paved roads, which encouraged international trade.

One contribution of the Persians was the religion called **Zoroastrianism**. Zoroaster was a Persian prophet who had seven visions. These visions served as the basis for the religion called Zoroastrianism. Zoroastrianism became the official religion of the Persian empire and flourished for many years. It is still practiced in some places today. The *Avesta*, the Persian Bible, based on the views of Zoroaster, teaches that there is one supreme god who made the world, sun, moon, and stars. Everything that is good in the world was created by this powerful god. His name is Ahura Mazda. He was the god of life. Another god, Ahriman, created everything that was evil and bad. He was the god of death.

Persia fought several wars with the Greeks. The Persian Empire, which is sometimes called the Achaemenid Empire, lasted until 330 B.C. when it was conquered by Alexander the Great.

### PERSIAN CIVILIZATION AT A GLANCE

**WHERE:** East of the Fertile  
Crescent in the Middle East

**WHEN:** 550 B.C.–330 B.C.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

- Built roads and canals
- Divided the empire into provinces so that it could be governed better
- Wrote the *Avesta*, the Persian Bible, based on the views of Zoroaster, a prophet
- Did not invent coinage, but were the first to put it to wide use

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Persian Civilization Quiz

Fill in the following sentences with the appropriate word or words.

1. In only \_\_\_\_\_ years, Cyrus's army conquered almost all of the ancient world.
2. The \_\_\_\_\_ kingdom included Asia Minor, the Fertile Crescent, the Indus Valley, and Egypt.
3. Many \_\_\_\_\_ welcomed the Persians because they were unhappy with their king.
4. When the Persians conquered Babylon, their first act was to free the \_\_\_\_\_ captives and lead them back to \_\_\_\_\_.
5. The Persians allowed the kingdoms they defeated to maintain their own \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ was killed in battle in 530 B.C.
7. The Persians treated those they defeated \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
8. The Persian Empire gained prominence under the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The name \_\_\_\_\_ is based on the name Aryan.
10. Persia occupied land that is presently \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
11. The Persians were Indo- \_\_\_\_\_.
12. Conquered kingdoms were required to pay \_\_\_\_\_ to Persia.
13. In the Zoroastrian religion, \_\_\_\_\_ is the god of life.
14. In the Zoroastrian religion, \_\_\_\_\_ is the god of death.
15. In 550 B.C., Cyrus the Great led an army to defeat the \_\_\_\_\_.
16. The Persian Empire was located east of the \_\_\_\_\_.
17. \_\_\_\_\_ was the largest empire the ancient world had known.
18. Persians called themselves \_\_\_\_\_.
19. Judges and tax collectors were Persians appointed by the \_\_\_\_\_.
20. Darius divided this enormous empire into 20 provinces called \_\_\_\_\_.
21. Each satrapy was managed by a governor called a \_\_\_\_\_.
22. Persia fought several wars with the \_\_\_\_\_.
23. \_\_\_\_\_ was a Persian prophet.
24. The emperor had an \_\_\_\_\_ who would visit the satrapies to make sure the officials were doing their jobs well and being loyal to the emperor.
25. The \_\_\_\_\_ is the Persian Bible.
26. The Persian empire built well-paved roads, which encouraged international \_\_\_\_\_.
27. One contribution of the Persians was the religion called \_\_\_\_\_.
28. Persia was conquered by \_\_\_\_\_ in 330 B.C.
29. The Persian Empire is sometimes called the \_\_\_\_\_ Empire.
30. Zoroaster is said to have had \_\_\_\_\_ visions.