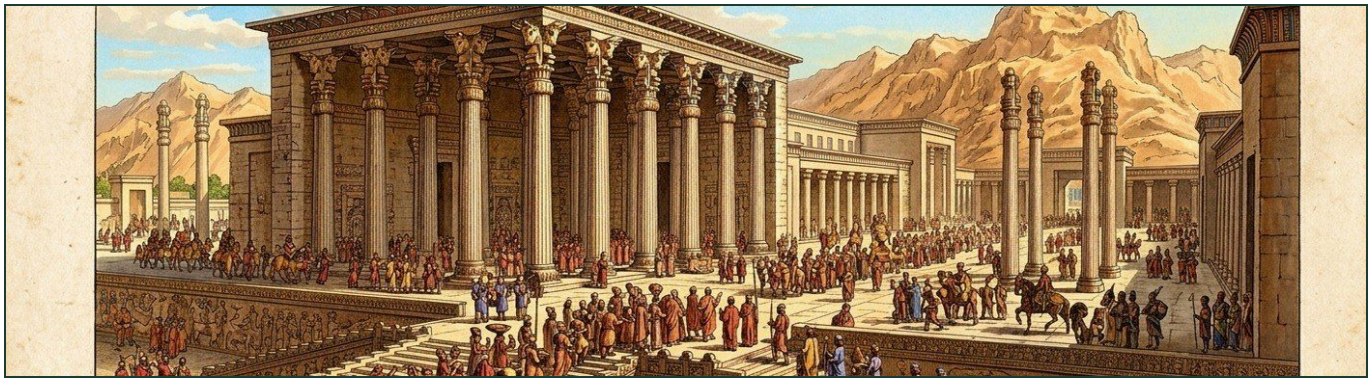


550 BC – 330 BC

Persian Empire Timeline

The Persian Empire — founded by Cyrus the Great around 550 BC — was the largest empire the ancient world had ever seen, stretching from Greece to India and governed through a revolutionary system of provinces, roads, and religious tolerance.

550 BC

Cyrus the Great Founds the Empire

The Persian king Cyrus II defeats the Median king Astyages and then conquers the kingdoms of Lydia (in modern Turkey) and the Medes, creating the largest empire the world had yet seen.

> **Why it mattered:** *Cyrus's rapid conquests established Persia as the dominant power from the Aegean to Central Asia; his policy of tolerating local customs and religions made the empire far more stable than previous conquests ruled purely by force.*

539 BC

Cyrus Conquers Babylon

Cyrus captures Babylon — then the most important city in the world — with almost no resistance; he issues the Cyrus Cylinder, a clay tablet declaring that he will respect the city's gods and free peoples deported by the Babylonian kings, including the Jews.

> **Why it mattered:** *The Cyrus Cylinder is often called the world's first declaration of human rights; Cyrus's conquest of Babylon gave Persia control of Mesopotamia and earned him a reputation for justice that made other cities more willing to surrender.*

525 BC

Cambyses Conquers Egypt

Cyrus's son Cambyses II defeats the Egyptian pharaoh at the Battle of Pelusium and absorbs Egypt into the Persian Empire, extending Persian rule across the entire eastern Mediterranean coast.

> **Why it mattered:** *Adding Egypt gave Persia its wealthiest province and its Mediterranean coastline, completing the empire's control of the ancient Near East and making it the most powerful state in the world.*

Persian Empire Timeline *continued*

522–486 BC

Darius I Reorganizes the Empire

Darius I crushes a series of rebellions after Cambyses' death, then reorganizes the empire into 20 provinces called satrapies, each governed by a royal-appointed satrap; he builds the Royal Road from Sardis to Susa and begins construction of Persepolis.

> **Why it mattered:** *Darius transformed a collection of conquered territories into a functioning empire with standardized laws, coinage, and communication — the Royal Road's relay messengers could carry a message nearly 2,700 km in a week, giving the emperor unprecedented control over distant provinces.*

490 BC

Battle of Marathon

A Persian army sent by Darius to punish Athens for supporting a Greek rebellion lands at Marathon and is defeated by a smaller Athenian force, who then famously march back to Athens to prevent a second Persian landing.

> **Why it mattered:** *Marathon was a shock — the supposedly invincible Persian army had been defeated by a Greek city-state — and it inspired Greek confidence while humiliating Darius; his son Xerxes would spend a decade planning revenge.*

480 BC

Xerxes Invades Greece

The Persian king Xerxes leads a massive invasion of Greece; 300 Spartans hold the pass at Thermopylae long enough for Greece to prepare; Xerxes burns Athens, but the Greek navy defeats the Persian fleet at Salamis and Xerxes retreats.

> **Why it mattered:** *The battles of Thermopylae and Salamis became defining moments in Western history — Salamis ended Persia's chance of conquering Greece and saved the Greek city-states that would produce Socrates, Plato, and the foundations of Western philosophy and democracy.*

449 BC

Peace of Callias

Athens and Persia sign the Peace of Callias (or a formal agreement of mutual non-aggression), ending fifty years of conflict and establishing the Aegean Sea and western Anatolia as roughly the boundary between Greek and Persian spheres.

> **Why it mattered:** *The peace recognized Persia's failure to conquer Greece and allowed both sides to focus internally; for Athens it signaled the start of its Golden Age — the great age of the Parthenon, Sophocles, and Socrates.*

334–330 BC

Alexander the Great Conquers Persia

The Macedonian king Alexander III crosses into Anatolia, defeats Persian forces three times — at Granicus (334 BC), Issus (333 BC), and Gaugamela (331 BC) — captures Persepolis and burns it, then pursues the last Persian king Darius III until Darius is killed by his own nobles in 330 BC.

> **Why it mattered:** *Alexander's conquest ended the 220-year Achaemenid dynasty and spread Greek language and culture across the entire former Persian Empire — from Egypt to Afghanistan — beginning the Hellenistic Age that shaped the ancient world for the next three centuries.*