

Civilizations: Persia 612-330 B.C.

Note: This lesson focuses on the Persian Empire that dominated Mesopotamia from 612-330 B.C. You'll learn about the Hebrews Under Persian rule (approximately 539-332 B.C.) in the The Persian Period lesson and about Queen Esther in the [Ancient Israel Unit](#).

Step 1 Excite

We know much about the Persians because of their interaction with the Greeks, who wrote prolifically. It was the largest empire in history until it was overrun by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. For more than three thousand years Persia was a melting pot of civilizations and demographic movements between Asia and Europe. Under Cyrus the Great, it became the centre of the world's first empire. Successive invasions by the Greeks, Arabs, Mongols, and Turks developed the nation's culture through rich and diverse philosophical, artistic, scientific, and religious influences.

Find Persia on a map in [The Holman Bible Atlas](#). Look at Iran on a [modern map](#).

Step 2 Examine

Though the terms "Persia" or "Persian" occur only in Ezekiel, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Daniel, and Ezra, ancient Persia played an important role in the Old Testament books, including 2 Chronicles, Daniel, Esther, Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

Persia extended from the Indus to Thrace, and from the Caspian Sea to the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. The Persians were originally a Medic tribe which settled in Persia, on the eastern side of the Persian Gulf. They were Aryans, their language belonging to the eastern division of the Indo-European group. One of their chiefs, Teispes, conquered Elam in the time of the decay of the Assyrian Empire, and established himself in the district of Anzan. His descendants branched off into two lines, one line ruling in Anzan, while the other remained in Persia. Cyrus II, king of Anzan, finally united the divided power, conquered Media, Lydia, and Babylonia, and carried his armies into the far East. His son, Cambyses, added Egypt to the empire, which, however, fell to pieces after his death. It was reconquered and thoroughly organized by Darius, the son of Hystaspes, whose dominions extended from India to the Danu.¹

Read this overview about Persia from *Smith's Bible Dictionary*:

Resources recommended in ♦ several lessons, ★ several units, ♥ other HOW Units. 🔑 Key Resource (see beginning of unit).

Mesopotamia

Character of the nation: The Persians were a people of lively and impressible minds, brave and impetuous in war, witty, passionate, for Orientals truthful, not without some spirit of generosity: and of more intellectual capacity than the generality of Asiatics. In the times anterior to Cyrus they were noted for the simplicity of their habits, which offered a strong contrast to the luxuriousness of the Medes; but from the late of the Median overthrow this simplicity began to decline. Polygamy was commonly practiced among them. They were fond of the pleasures of the table. In war they fought bravely, but without discipline.

Religion: The religion which the Persians brought with them into Persia proper seems to have been of a very simple character, differing from natural religion in little except that it was deeply tainted with Dualism. Like the other Aryans, the Persians worshipped one supreme God. They had few temples, and no altars or images.

Language: The Persian language was closely akin to the Sanskrit, or ancient language of India. Modern Persian is its degenerate representative, being largely impregnated with Arabic.

History: The history of Persia begins with the revolt from the Medes and the accession of Cyrus the Great, B.C. 558. Cyrus defeated Croesus, and added the Lydian empire to his dominions. This conquest was followed closely by the submission of the Greek settlements on the Asiatic coast, and by the reduction of Caria and Lycia. The empire was soon afterward extended greatly toward the northeast and east. In B.C. 539 or 538, Babylon was attacked, and after a stout defense fell into the hands of Cyrus. This victory first brought the Persians into contact with the Jews. The conquerors found in Babylon an oppressed race—like themselves, abhorers of idols, and professors of a religion in which to a great extent they could sympathize. This race Cyrus determined to restore to their own country: which he did by the remarkable edict recorded in the first chapter of Ezra. (Ezra 1:2-4) He was slain in an expedition against the Massagetae or the Derbices, after a reign of twenty-nine years. Under his son and successor, Cambyses, the conquest of Egypt took place, B.C. 525. This prince appears to be the Ahasuerus of (Ezra 4:6) Gomates, Cambyses' successor, reversed the policy of Cyrus with respect to the Jews, and forbade by an edict the further building of the temple. (Ezra 4:17-22) He reigned but seven months, and was succeeded by Darius. Appealed to, in his second year, by the Jews, who wished to resume the construction of their temple, Darius not only granted them this privilege, but assisted the work by grants from his own revenues, whereby the Jews were able to complete the temple as early as his sixth year. (Ezra 6:1-15) Darius

Underlined text refers to Internet link.

was succeeded by Xerxes, probably the Ahasuerus of Esther. Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes, reigned for forty years after his death and is beyond doubt the king of that name who stood in such a friendly relation toward Ezra, (Ezra 7:11-28) and Nehemiah. (Nehemiah 2:1-9) etc. He is the last of the Persian kings who had any special connection with the Jews, and the last but one mentioned in Scripture. His successors were Xerxes II, Sogdianus Darius Nothus, Artaxerxes Mnemon, Artaxerxes Ochus, and Darius Codomannus, who is probably the “Darius the Persian” of Nehemiah (Nehemiah 12:22). These monarchs reigned from B.C. 424 to B.C. 330. The collapse of the empire under the attack of Alexander the Great took place B.C. 330.²

Persia Timeline

- 715 B.C. Medes conquer Persia
- 550 B.C. Persians overthrow Medes
- 539 B.C. Cyrus the Great of Persia captures Babylon
- 539-332 B.C. Judah becomes province of Persian empire
- 485-465 BC Reign of Xerxes
- 480 B.C. Esther becomes Queen of Persia
- 465 B.C. Death of Xerxes
- 336-330 B.C. Reign of Darius Codomannus
- 330 B.C. Alexander the Great conquers Persian Empire

Four great and powerful kings dominated the political history of Persia:























1. Cyrus: Read about him in the Bible in “Cyrus King of Persia” - 2 Chronicles 36:22,23; Ezra 1; 3:7; 4:3; 5:13,14,17; 6:3; Isaiah 41:2,3; 44:28; 45:1-4,13; 46:11; 48:14,15.
2. Artaxerxes, also known as Cambyses, is the king who obstructed the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:7): Read about him in the Bible in Nehemiah 1-13; Ezra 7-10.
3. Darius: Read about him in the Bible in Ezra 5,6; Daniel 5:31; 6; 9:1.
4. Xerxes was Darius’s son. He continued the war against the Greeks but was defeated by Alexander the Great. The book of Esther was written late in the reign of Xerxes (or possibly his son’s). Read about him in the Bible in Esther 1-10.

Research Persia. Use any resource (an encyclopedia, non-fiction book, historical novel, or the Internet). We recommend the following:



Resources recommended in ♦ several lessons, ★ several units, ♥ other HOW Units. 🔑 Key Resource (see beginning of unit).

Mesopotamia

Books



-   [The Holman Bible Atlas](#)  
Read: “The Persian Period” (164-173).
-   [First Civilizations \(Cultural Atlas for Young People\)](#)  
Read: “Rise of the Persian Empire” and “The Empire of Darius” (82-85).
-   [The Usborne Book of the Ancient World](#)  
Read: “The Persians” (77).
-   [Kingfisher History Encyclopedia](#)  
Read: “The Persian Empire” (40-41).
-   [Ancient Civilizations \(Exploring History\)](#) 
Read: “The Persian Empire” (14-15).
-  [Mesopotamia and the Fertile Crescent](#)  
Read: “Persia: The Rising New Power” (58-59).

Internet Sources

-  [The Persian Empire](#)
Description: A list of important events of the Persian era to help one understand the significance of the Persian civilization’s influence on future governments.
-  [Early Days of Persia](#)
Description: A small timeline from 2000 B.C. to A.D. 642.

Step 3 Expand

Choose and complete one of the following activities:

-   Activity 1: Add to Your Time Line Book
Add the Persian timeline events and the Persian kings (Step 2) to your Time Line Book. Refer to [Reproducible Maps, Charts, Timelines & Illustrations](#) (101).

Underlined text refers to Internet link.



Activity 2: Contrast and Compare

Read the Book of Esther. As you read make a list in a [contrast and compare graphic](#) (see page 26) comparing the way the Hebrews lived while in captivity to the way the Persians lived. Prompt younger children with questions during the reading.



Activity 3: Write Summaries

Use the Bible references above and write a summary about each Persian king. Include your feelings of what God is telling us about these men and their actions.



Activity 4: Answer Questions

1. In what modern-day country was the Persian Empire located?
2. Persia was the largest world empire until conquered by whom?
3. Who were the four “powerful” Persian kings?
4. What accomplishments did each of these four kings have?
5. Who was Zoroaster?



Activity 5: Expand Your Research

Research and write a report on modern Iran. Include the history of their religion and their relationship with the Hebrews. Go to [CountryWatch.com](#) for information. CountryWatch.com is an information provider of up-to-date information and news on the countries of the world.



Activity 6: Expand Your Research

In writing, describe and assess the circumstances surrounding the Persians’ Defeat at Plataea by using the Internet and other resources. Explain the people involved and the repercussions.



Activity 7: Write a Biographical Sketch

Write a biographical sketch about Cyrus the Great. Refer to “Writing about a Person” in *Writers INC*.

Step 4 Excel

Explain orally to your parents what you’ve learned in this lesson. Correct all written work to demonstrate correct punctuation and spelling, and effective use of grammar. Include corrected written work in your portfolio.

Footnotes

1. Easton, M.G. M.A., D.D. (1897). *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, Third Edition, Thomas Nelson.
2. Smith, William, Dr. “Entry for ‘Assyria, Asshur,’” *Smith’s Bible Dictionary*.