Name: _____

Date: _____

ANCIENT GREECE
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Cyrus the Great and the Persian Empire

The Greeks called them barbarians — odd people who wore pants. They regarded the Greeks as quarrelsome people living at the edge of the civilized world. Persia stretched from Egypt to the Indus River, the largest empire the world had ever known. Unlike Greece, Persia was not a collection of competing city-states. It was a vast empire made up of many different peoples and cultures. No ruler before Alexander the Great had governed so much land or so many people.

Origins

In small, isolated hamlets on the border of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, you will find the Pamiri people. Genetic and linguistic evidence link them to cattle herders who called themselves the Aryans, or "honorable people." More than 3,500 years ago, the Aryans dispersed in two directions, leaving in waves over centuries. Some went southeast to settle in India, bringing with them the gods and hymns that would become Hinduism's oldest sacred texts. Others moved southwest to the plateau in what we now call Iran. In fact, Iran derives from Aryan.

Over time, these Iranian peoples formed kingdoms across the plateau. Among them were the Persians, whose rulers would eventually unite much of the ancient world. Before that empire emerged, however, another idea helped shape Persian identity: the teachings of the prophet Zoroaster.

Zoroastrianism

Zoroastrians were neither monotheists nor polytheists. They believed in one supreme god, Ahura Mazda, the source of light and truth—but locked against him was Angra Mainyu (ANG-rah MY-nyoo), the spirit of darkness and the lie. Between them stood every human being, forced to choose a side. This dualistic faith was the predominant religion of Persia from about 1000 BCE until the coming of Islam in the 7th century CE. Today, small Zoroastrian communities remain in Iran, but most live in India.

Cyrus the Great

Cyrus was a Persian prince who led a revolt against the Medes. After defeating them, he conquered Lydia in present-day Turkey, giving him control of rich trade routes to the Mediterranean. He then captured Babylon, the greatest city in the ancient Near East.

Tolerance

Cyrus was unusual among conquerors for his tolerance. Instead of forcing conquered peoples to adopt Persian customs, he usually allowed them to keep their own language, religion, and traditions. When he captured Babylon, he freed the Jews from captivity and allowed them to return to Jerusalem. By treating many conquered peoples with respect, Cyrus earned their loyalty and made his vast empire easier to govern.

Darius

Darius seized the Persian throne after his rivals killed Cyrus' son and heir — at least that was Darius' version. Some historians suggest Darius may be responsible for the murder. During his reign, Darius ordered the construction of the Royal Road, a highway stretching 1,677 miles from the Aegean coast to the Persian Gulf. A royal courier could cross the entire empire in nine days. On foot, the same journey took three months.

Darius also divided the empire into twenty provinces, each ruled by a governor known as a satrap. A satrap collected taxes, kept order, and answered directly to the king — but day to day, local cultures kept their own laws, religions, and languages intact. Persian rule, layered on top, asked for loyalty and tribute, not conformity. Some estimates suggest that more than 40 percent of the world's population lived under Persian rule, a larger share of humanity than either the Roman or Mongol empires ever governed.

Xerxes

Darius' son Xerxes invaded Greece, but a Greek fleet broke his navy at Salamis, and Persia never conquered Greek soil for good. A century and a half later, Alexander the Great burned Persepolis, and ended the empire Cyrus had built.

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Name: _____

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Fill in the Blanks

The Persian Empire stretched from E__y__t to the I__d__s River and was the l__r__e__t empire the world had ever known. Persia *u__i__ed many different peoples and c__l__u__es under one r__l__r. The Persians were one of the *I__a__i__n peoples whose ancestors were the A__ya__s. Some Aryans settled in I__d__a, while others settled on the Iranian P__a__e__u. Many Persians followed the teachings of Z__r__a__t__r, who taught that A__u__a M__z__a was the source of l__g__t and o__p__s__d by darkness. Cyrus defeated the M__d__s, conquered L__d__a and B__b__l__n, and built an e__p__re. Cyrus allowed the people he c__n__u__r__d to keep their language, r__l__g__on, and t__a__i__io__s. Darius expanded the empire by building the R__y__l Road and dividing Persia into p__o__i__c__s ruled by satraps. Some estimates suggest that more than ____% of the world's population lived under D__r__us' rule. His son X__r__es invaded G__e__ce but was defeated at S__l__m__s. Alexander the Great later c__n__u__r__d Persia and burned P__r__e__o__is, ending the empire C__r__s built.

Answer in Complete Sentence

1. Where does the name of the modern nation of Iran come from?

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_____

*2. Explain why Zoroastrian was neither monotheist nor polytheistic.

_____

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*3. What qualifies Cyrus to be known as "the Great?"

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4. What was the function of the Persian Royal Road?

_____

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*This is a higher order learning question. You must answer the question to the best of your ability, but any reasonable answer will be graded as correct.

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