

# Dr. Donald Fowler, Old Testament Backgrounds, Lecture 22, Persian Empire

© 2024 Don Fowler and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 22, The Persian Empire.

Well, welcome back.

You may not have gone anywhere, but I say welcome back in the sense that we're in our next tape segment, and this tape segment will be completely on the Persian Empire, an empire that lasted several centuries but an empire that can be very difficult for us to interpret as we would like. When Cyrus became king of Persia, he was in vassalage to the king of Media. When these tribes emerged into prominence, Media was the greatest of the five tribes, so Cyrus was not the great all-conquering king that we think of when we think of this individual.

He was a subordinate to Astyages. As a matter of fact, Cyrus was so talented and so obviously on the rise that Astyages summoned him to come and appear before him at his capital in Ecbatana. So, Cyrus refused to come, and Astyages marched on Cyrus at his capital at Anshan.

So, on the way, and this is an activity that seemed to presage the events of Cyrus's life, amazingly, the troops of Astyages rose up against him and took him and handed him over as a captive to Cyrus. This is sort of typical of the tenor of events throughout the rise of Cyrus to world prominence. When Cyrus came to power in 559, the world was as follows.

The chief superpower was Babylon, which controlled the Fertile Crescent. It was followed closely by Media, which controlled a giant arc encompassing Babylon in the north and east. Lydia controlled the remainder of the Anatolian Plateau, which would be the western, more coastal part of Anatolia. The great power to the southwest was Egypt, but it was also clear that Egypt was like an old lion, capable of killing a weakened foe but harmless against a strong one.

So that's the world map when Cyrus became king. As mentioned, Cyrus first united the great cities of Persia and Media, adroitly, of course, declaring Ecbatana the capital of his interests. Now, I'd like to pause here and make a point to you that is frustrating even at this late stage of my life, and that is this.

We do not have a single Persian inscription. Zero. The only document that we have in Persian is on the wall of a mountain, the famous Behistun Inscription.

So, what we are forced to do is talk about a group of people who ruled for hundreds of years and were the leading power in the history of the world for 200-plus years, but we have no documents to speak of them. So, what that means is we are forced to rely largely, hugely, on Greek material, and so I caution my audience by telling you this, we do not have material from the Persian perspective. What we have is from the Greeks.

So, as we look at these 200 years, unless we have information from the Bible, we have no information. Now, of course, there's always artifactual information, pottery analysis, site stratigraphy, and things like that. But what we're missing is the Persian history that we would very much like to have.

So what I would like to do before I go any further is make a point to you as almost all the books, unless you're reading somebody who is a true professional, almost all the books suffer from being influenced by the Greek perspective, which inevitably disliked the Persians, and so we always, on some level, okay, I want to pause, we always, on some level, have a sort of skewed, if not a completely distorted perspective on what happened. The Greeks hated the Persians, and so the information that we have is always skewed by the Greek perspective. So that makes it very difficult for us to talk about the Persian Empire because we just don't really have any Persian historical sources.

So, having said that, we want to tell you that I will, on occasion disagree with the Greek sources, but even as I do so, my disagreement is more intuitive. I am backfilling a void without any information to fill in. So having said that, and having made that point, Cyrus united the two tribes and then, at some time, began to launch his military career.

He turned his attention to the great power to the west, which was Lydia. So, if we want to see where Lydia was, let's go back to the Neo-Babylonian, and I can show you; here is a picture of the Lydian kingdom. Do you see this green area that comprises western and northern Anatolia? That was the great Lydian kingdom, and we're not even 100% sure if this is the sequence of events, but at some time, Cyrus turned his attention toward conquering Lydia.

The boundary between Lydia and Anatolia was the Halas River, and so Cyrus attacked and was repulsed by the king, Croesus. So, following his victory, Croesus withdrew to the west side of the Halas, and he expected Cyrus to do the same thing. After all, if you are caught on the Anatolian Plateau in winter, it can lead to your destruction.

So, he withdrew, and he expected Cyrus to do the same, but Cyrus surprised him by taking the Lydian capital, Sardis, which he promptly made a new satrapy. Now the word satrapy is a new word to us. It's a Persian word, and it's a word to describe a

sort of a political boundary or identity, something kind of like a state in America or something like that, or an independent nation.

So, he controlled all of the Ark over Mesopotamia because he controlled Lydia. Now, to show you what we face with the complete lack of information, look at my sentence. Sometime before or after the Lydian campaign, he turned his attention eastward.

We can't even say with certainty that Cyrus attacked the East before or after Lydia. We simply do not have that information. But he turned and he conquered east as far as the Indus River.

If Xenophon, the Greek historian, is correct. So here's a man who succeeded in conquering everything, from the Indus River basin all the way to the islands of the Aegean Sea, and we really can't recreate how or when he did that. So, what we can say is the dramatic conquests of Cyrus changed the world like no other person up to this point in world history.

The monolith that confronted Nabonidus may well have run from the Babylonians. So the Babylonians, small wonder, opened the gates to welcome Cyrus as their king. Now, here's where we have some advantages.

It's not always easy to say how much, but we have the perspective of Cyrus in the Bible. Cyrus is one of only two people in the Bible who are named before they're even alive. Isaiah mentions him by name, and of course, Isaiah was from the time of Hezekiah, which would have been centuries before Cyrus was born.

So, this has led to a critical perspective on Isaiah that says that there were really two Isaiahs. The Isaiah who wrote chapters 1 through 39, and then scholars refer to a second Isaiah, the Isaiah who is embodied in chapters 40 through 56, and many critical scholars hold to a Trito-Isaiah, that is, a third Isaiah who wrote 56 through 66. So for those of us who regard Isaiah as the single author, then we would say that Cyrus is known because God predicted his name.

At any rate, from a Biblicist's perspective, listen to what Isaiah wrote about Cyrus. It is I who says of Cyrus, he is my shepherd and he will perform all my desire. And he declares of Jerusalem, she will be built, and of the temple, your foundation will be laid.

Thus says the Lord to Cyrus, his anointed, whom I have taken by the right hand to subdue nations before him and to lose the loins of kings to open the doors before him so that gates will not be shut. This is probably a reference to the fall of Babylon. I will go on before you and make the rough places smooth.

I will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places in order that you may know that it is I, Japheth, the God of Israel who calls you by your name. This is an unprecedented, amazing reference to a king who has centuries yet to come.

So, it's no wonder that our critical friends would argue that this is not from Isaiah but from some other writer two centuries later. The picture of Cyrus in the Bible is uniformly positive, and the picture that Cyrus left to us is uniformly positive.

Unfortunately, we don't have any Persian records to conform to that picture. So, we speak from a vacuum. From a biblical perspective or from a human perspective, it is easy to see why God would choose this man to perform his will.

He was a man of unquestioned brilliance and courage and Alexander without the latter's shortcomings. His policies probably explained his successes as much as anything. History has suggested to us that Cyrus was the first humanitarian.

The Cyrus Cylinder exists in the United Nations as an example of the first humanitarian king, the first king who had a vision of a united world in which human rights play an important part. So, these policies of Cyrus, if accurate, paint him to be the world's first humanitarian. So, I have four points for you.

If you would like to write these down, that's up to you. You have the tape so you don't necessarily have to write these down. But the four points are as follows.

Unlike his predecessors, Cyrus encouraged the well-being of local religions. In other words, contrary to the Babylonians and, to a lesser degree, the Assyrians, Cyrus promoted local religion. This may be because the Persians were newbies in the pages of history.

It's not like they had a religious tradition that went back to the third millennium. So, perhaps that explains why they were more open to the religious cults of their world. But Cyrus was well known as a king who encouraged local religions.

Secondly, Cyrus was also a king who regularly showed leniency to the conquered foes. Now, you who were with me, we saw the graphic, nauseating, horrifying pictures of Assyrian behavior. Try to imagine that Cyrus was on the other side of the pendulum.

He regularly showed leniency to foes that he had conquered so that Cretaceous was allowed to continue ruling in his own country even after Cyrus had defeated him. This leniency certainly won the loyalty of the people that Cyrus had conquered. Not only did he show leniency, but he allowed conquered powers autonomy.

That is to say, as long as they were willing to be loyal to the Persians, he would grant them the opportunity of self-rule. Between leniency and autonomy, these two actions of the Persian king could not have been more extremely opposite of the Persians, no matter what we might have proposed. This is just remarkable.

It breathed a different life into the international world of Cyrus's era. Third, Cyrus encouraged and supported the opportunity of these peoples who had been deported by the Assyrians and the Babylonians to return to their homelands. In other words, he conceived of a humanitarian world in which he conquered people.

Do you remember I mentioned that the Assyrians had deported something like four and a half million people? And we can't say, I don't know of any statistic I've ever seen about how many the Babylonians did, but one can guess that it pushed the number over five million total. Well, these are people, many of whom had become grafted into their new regions, but these were people who Cyrus thought should be able to go to their homelands if they wanted. This, of course, had amazing repercussions for the Jews of Babylon because Cyrus issued a decree saying that they could return to Jerusalem.

Amazing. Last, Cyrus was the world's first effective white propagandist. Okay, in today's world, when I say white propagandist, that would sound like I'm talking like a racist.

What I'm really doing is reflecting on two adjectives propagandists employ to describe the nature of propaganda. White propaganda is a term used for benign, positive propaganda. Black propaganda is an adjective used for terrifying, negative propaganda.

Up to this point, you could say that the Assyrians employed black propaganda like no other people in the history of the world. Cyrus was the first king to conceive of the value of white propaganda, that is, to present himself not as a conqueror, which is what he really was, but he successfully presented himself as a liberator. If we read the Greek literature correctly, or I should say if the Greeks wrote it correctly, Cyrus was the most amazing king of all the ancient world.

The first humanitarian, the first libertarian, the first person to conceive of religious freedom, and the first person to recognize human dignity, Cyrus stands out as the most unique king of all of antiquity. Now, the question is whether that picture is accurate or not. The picture that Cyrus presented was picked up by the Greeks, and it was convenient for them to accept Cyrus as a humanitarian because the Greeks could use that as reverse propaganda against the Persians.

Because when Cyrus died, almost immediately, there was a dramatic shift, according to the Greeks, there was a dramatic shift from that kind of humanitarian world

approach to the more classical approach of rabid nationalism. So, the Greeks may have presented Cyrus in ways that were ideal rather than real. I read an article last fall by an individual, a scholar of some consequence, who was saying that Cyrus actually employed formulaic language to describe himself and that it's not to be read literally.

So, who knows? I am influenced by the Bible's picture because, in my way of thinking, if the Bible describes him as God's shepherd and describes him in positive terms, then that's an accurate picture of who he was. So, we could not have a more diametrical opposite to the behavior of kings than Cyrus and Ashurnasirpal. It makes it easy to enjoy making Persian history.

Amazing, Cyrus died fighting against the Masageti in the Caucasus area, a fitting end for the most successful warrior the world had ever known. I say a fitting end because I think of the end of Alexander. Alexander died in some form of brokenness on a bed in Babylon. Perhaps a life of dissipation had wrecked its way upon his body.

Cyrus died a warrior's death. It's almost as if he was spared the effects of power, and he chose to die leading his troops against an obscure mountainous tribe. His troops carried his body all the way from the Caucasus back to the Iranian plateau, and there his monument exists to this very day.

The body is gone, the grave goods are gone, but the monument sits as silent but eloquent testimony of one of the greatest human beings who perhaps had ever lived. And so, Cyrus stands out as we look at the pages of history as a shining light which, for the first time in history, offers humanity an alternative direction rather than a butte, brute, rapacious power; there was this example of Cyrus the Great. Well, such may not be the case with his son Cambyses.

In my opening paragraph, I suggest to you that it is extremely difficult to analyze his reign since all of the written history about him is Greek. The Greeks were not just prone to exaggeration; they were chronic exaggerators, and their hatred against the Persians certainly brought about a skewed perspective, as evidenced in their literature. So, here's how I can show you two different understandings of Cambyses radically different, but we have no way of knowing for sure.

So apparently, Cambyses had made long preparations for an invasion of Egypt. By his fifth year, he invaded Egypt and was immediately successful in capturing the king as well as Memphis. This appeared to be due in part to the defection of a Greek general in the hire of the Egyptian and so here we have the case of a Greek general who was hired by the Egyptians who defected to Cambyses and revealed the Egyptian defenses.

At first, Cyrus' policies, according to the Greeks, mirrored those of his father. He paid homage to Egyptians by giving them the gods, placed an Egyptian in charge of administering the country, and ordered reforms in the interest of the Egyptian people. Now you hear me pausing because the Greeks pictured Cambyses as crazy, and so Cambyses launched an imperial campaign to the west, and the first entity that they tried to conquer in the west was Libya, well, Egypt, excuse me.

This was automatically a threat to the Greeks. If he could come west down here, then that meant he could come west up here. So, it's plausible that the Greeks had it in their interest to present Cambyses as an adversary rather than a liberator like Cyrus wanted to be pictured.

He then, the text tells us, after his campaign to conquer Ethiopia, which was successful, I'm sorry I should have done this before, Ethiopia is the region to the south. This is very confusing because in today's map, the area immediately south of Egypt is Sudan, and then many hundreds of miles south of Sudan is Ethiopia. But in antiquity, Ethiopia was immediately south of Egypt.

So, Cambyses invaded the south but was not successful. Now, I'm going to try to paint an alternative picture of Cambyses that suggests that maybe he wasn't crazy. After all, we can plausibly answer why he invaded the South.

He invaded the south because all of the gold supply of Egypt came from the south, from Ethiopia also called Nubia. So, it makes good sense to argue that Cambyses invaded the south in order to have unlimited access to the gold deposits. He was not the first Egyptian pharaoh who was not successful in conquering the south.

It was very difficult to get an army up the Nile River into Ethiopia. So, he was unsuccessful in the south, and then, in the Greek tradition of describing these events, it was then that his troubles began. Herodotus, may I remind you, was a Greek historian who claimed that he was afflicted with the sacred disease.

Now, the sacred disease was the ancient inhabitants' observation of what happened to so many kings in antiquity who married their sisters. It became a relatively common thing for kings to marry their sisters and thereby create a double legitimate claim for themselves as kings. So, you're not marrying a woman outside the family. You're marrying within the family, which cuts down on the threat of opposition.

Unfortunately, as you and I know, because of the modern study of genetics, when you marry within your biological line, genetic problems arise. The ancients interpreted that as they did everything else religiously. So, they thought this was a sacred disease that somehow the gods were afflicting them, and so they blamed what they understood to be Cambyses' problems because he was crazy.

Well, maybe he was. Maybe he was the result of an incestuous union. But let's be reminded that the Greeks have good reasons to dislike Cambyses.

He's not content with the magnificent empire his father gave him. He wants to make it larger. So, according to Herodotus, he then slew the sacred bull of Apis at Memphis, along with other bizarre actions, including killing his sister-wife, Roxanne.

Now, maybe these traditions are real. Maybe these traditions about Cambyses are fabricated. But it's possible to make perfectly good sense of his behavior.

It's possible to explain his military attempts as part of a grand strategic plan to conquer the whole world. By conquering Ethiopia to the south, he was securing the gold supply. By conquering the West, he could well have conceived of a plan in which he is, in effect, uniting the whole world under Persian power.

He marches his army out to the west. They knew about things in the west. And I want to emphasize the word plausible since this is theoretical.

It's entirely plausible that he may have been moving his armies in order to bring all of North Africa under his control. After all, there were great political powers out here emerging in the form of Carthage. And so, it's plausible that he went south and then west for perfectly good reasons, quite apart from any insanity.

So, I'm sure you can tell if you are listening carefully that I am automatically suspicious of anything that the Greeks have to say about the Persians. So, for my part, he may or may not have been crazy, but the text tells us that he fell upon hard times. First, he was defeated in Ethiopia, or failed in Ethiopia, would be a better word to put it.

Then, he failed to the west. He marched his army out into the great Saharan desert to the west, and there, the army of 50,000 men was wiped out in a terrible desert storm. Now, we are unsure why he marched the army out.

There is an oasis here at a site called Siva out in this region, and some have suggested that he marched his army out into the west so that he could have himself divinized. Siva was the place where Egyptian pharaohs went to be incarnated as the next Amun-Rei deity. Some have tried to argue that he marched his army out to Siva to be divinized.

It seems like to me that the better explanation is that he marched his army out to conquer Kyrenia, or Libya, as it would be better known. To the Greeks, he marched his army out into the desert because of his insanity. Tragically, the army was destroyed.



This army went missing for 2,500 years. In the last several decades, or maybe three decades now, since time gets away from me, the remnants of this army have actually been found in the desert of Egypt. So, with this in mind, Cambyses had no choice but to retrace his steps and leave Egypt because he had failed in his major efforts.

And so, this leads to a final paragraph of utter confusion. Cambyses starts his way back to Persia, but he hears that his brother Smerdis, Bardiya, had proclaimed himself king of Persia in his brother's absence. Hence, he returned to secure for himself the throne.

Now, this has a possible level of plausibility because Cambyses was brand new to the throne and because the Persian Empire was brand new, so there's not a historic tradition to be defended. So perhaps his brother did usurp the throne for himself. There are two views, however, about all of this.

According to Herodotus, Cambyses accidentally wounded himself with his own sword. Now, I don't know about you, but this sounds to me very implausible. Herodotus said that in his madness, he accidentally killed and wounded himself and died from a self-inflicted sword event.

That sounds to me implausible. But this led to one of the strangest events in Persian history. There are two views about the death of the brother of Cambyses, who was named Smerdis.

One has it that Cambyses had him killed before he left Persia, but kept his death a secret. The other is that a pseudo- Smerdis, whose real name was Gaumata, killed Smerdis, the brother of Cambyses, and then had himself presented as the real Smerdis. Well, obviously, we're reading Greek literature.

We are never going to know the truth of what happened. But what happened for certain was this. Cambyses was dead.

Either Smerdis or a pseudo- Smerdis was on the throne of Persia, and there we are. So, as a result of these utterly bizarre actions, the world has entered into a strategic and nerve-wracking event, and that is a battle for the throne of Persia, which leads us fortuitously for the Persians to the person of Darius. Darius was not a direct descendant of Cyrus, but was of royal Achaemenid blood.

So, Cyrus, Darius, excuse me, begins to campaign to take the throne for himself. In about four months, he manages to defeat and kill pseudo- Smerdis, unless it was the real Smerdis, we just don't know. In all, he defeated nine separate kings to claim all 23 satrapies.

This monumental effort was recorded on the famous Behistun Inscription, which was written in Akkadian, Elamite, and Old Persian. It is one of the few Persian historical documents available. As a matter of fact, it's the only one of any size.

So, it was deciphered by George Rawlinson, who did so through the parallels of Old Persian with the Indo-European language and thus helped unlock the door to being able to read Akkadian. So, Darius became king, and Darius ended up in war with the Greeks. And so, this event of war between the Greeks and the Persians was going to occupy Persian history for the better part of a century.

Now, remember that the documents that we're reading are documents from the Greek perspective. So, they pictured Darius as a military predator, but in fact, a plausible explanation can be made for the Persian interference in the West, and that is because the Greeks were nervous about the Persians. And so, they began to meddle with these Greek-speaking Ionian city-states on the western coast of Anatolia.

So, let me set the stage for you, because you wouldn't automatically have knowledge of this. By this time in history, this whole area along the western coast was populated by itinerant Greeks, and Greek was the language of this region. They saw themselves as Greeks, even if these people over here saw them as something less than that. So, this region came to be called Ionia, and so the Greeks here began to foment rebellion among these Ionian city-states.

I suspect that this is what caused Darius to turn his attention to the West. After all, the original plan of Cambyses was probably a better plan. The Persians did not have a navy.

The better plan was to continue what Cambyses may have done, which is to march along North Africa. But instead, perhaps because of Greek meddling in Persian affairs, Darius decided to invade. We're going to use the word Greek in a generic sense. Greece at this time was divided into city-states, and so he invaded the area that we call Greece, even though that isn't necessarily the name of the region about which we're speaking.

It seems to me plausible that Darius invaded because of Greek meddling. There was not adequate wealth in what we call Greece to justify a difficult and perhaps expensive invasion of Greece proper. So, Darius' troops cross the Hellespont and enter into the region of Trachia, and there they win early victories, suppressing these Ionian cities, capturing Trachia and Macedonia, along with a few Greek cities, and through their hired navy, Cyprus.

But then begins a series of defeats that, you know, since I'm a theist, that is to say, I believe God controls the events of history, then it's almost as if the hand of God

orchestrates events to arrange for the defeat of this superpower against this very small political entity here. So, whatever the case, the Greeks end up winning, or perhaps the Persians end up losing. However we go about explaining it, this looks like David and Goliath on steroids.

So, the first catastrophe that seems to happen is that a part of the Persian fleet is lost near Mount Athos, which is not too far from Athens, in a fierce storm. Then, at Marathon, the forces of Darius move south, and the Greeks are greatly defeated. Few battles had more political significance with such minimal military consequences.

In typical Greek fashion, the Greeks exaggerated, imagining the Persian army at Marathon consisting of hundreds of thousands of troops. In reality, there were only a few hundred, maybe 25,000 troops in the Persian army, and they fought against a Greek force of about 11,000. It is at this battle of Marathon that the Greeks experienced their first true military defeat.

So, I thought I had a map of Marathon. Here's what we can describe to you in this battle of Marathon. If I could just have a little fun with you and say, we see the Greeks as the forefathers of our democracy.

We see them, you know, we have Greek architecture in Washington, D.C. Here on my campus at Liberty University, many of our buildings have Ionian-type columns, purely ceremonial, but they're outside, evidencing the triumph of Greek culture and the Greek model. And so, we see the Greeks as the heroes, and we tend to have the Persians painted as the bad guys. And so, I would just caution any person reading ancient history to fight against this perspective.

In the first place, this was not a triumph of democracy over tyranny for one reason: the Greeks had not yet invented democracy. They had like an oligarchy. Only a very few people in Greece actually had the opportunity to vote.

You had to be wealthy, owner of land, you had to be able to sponsor X number of warriors to go in. So, if you were wealthy and important, you had to vote. It was hardly democracy as we think of it.

So, I would encourage all of you to fight the tendency to picture this as the triumph of the West over the decadent East, to fight the concept that the Greeks were the good guys and the Persians were the perverts. It literally gets presented that way, and it is really, in my judgment, a bad history. And so, I have heard Marathon. As a matter of fact, I am currently without an office because we are building a new school for our divinity school.

And so, my books are all at home, and so I don't have access to this book, but it's a book in which when I'm teaching this in the classroom, I bring the book, and I read

the cover page because it is so absurd, it takes the breath away. The cover page pictures the battle of Marathon as God against the fallen angels, you know, black versus white, good versus bad. This is nothing short of absurd.

It's a battle. It's not a battle between good guys and bad guys. To be sure, it's a battle between two tectonic forces, which for the first time in history, lead us, for the first time in history, a battle between what will come to be called the West, and what has been called the East.

Always before, the geography of battle has been within the arch of my pen. It has always been in the Middle East. Now, for the very first time in history, we have an important battle fought between East and West here at Marathon, and the winner of these battles will result in the shift of world power from the Middle East to the West.

That is of monumental importance. It means that the Western tradition has its roots in the Greco-Roman world and not in the Middle Eastern world. At least in my judgment, that doesn't mean that the Middle Eastern world is bad, corrupt, decadent, or perverted

What it means is that our culture in the West is rooted in the Greco-Roman era, and the first battle of these tectonic forces shifting against one another is at Marathon. What we see in this battle at Marathon is the triumph of Greek military forces over the Persians. So what we know happened was something like this.

Again, my artwork is something less than what's found in the Metropolitan Museum. As is the case, the Greeks divided their forces into three units. Commonly, this is what happened.

The Persian forces were several times larger. Try to imagine the drama of this moment because it is dramatic, even if it's not the good guys against the bad guys. But the drama of this moment is dramatic.

The Persians have never been defeated in battle. Never. And so now their forces, about 25,000, are gathered outside the Greeks and they have divided their forces into three units.

Of course, the Persians are lined up here. We'll make fun of modern-day perspectives and call the Persians the bad guys. They never brush their teeth.

The Persians are lined up over here, and so the Persians attack. But it turns out that the Greeks have an impressive battle plan. Who knew? So the Persians allow these Persian forces to succeed against the middle.

And so, the Greeks purposely, because their soldiers are much better trained, after all, it's a city-state system. So, what happens is they force that marathon. They have their center, the center of their military retreat.

Well, if you know anything about the military, when you lose the center, this is the annihilation of your army. So, the center retreats like this. The Persians naturally think that they have won the battle and so they follow them right into the trap.

You see, what the Greeks do then is they envelop on both sides. They envelop the Persian forces. Now, the center that has moved here, it holds and the entire Persian force is caught, surrounded.

They are virtually annihilated. Well, what has happened is not that the good guys win. What has happened is that the Greeks are teaching the world about a new form of battle that is truly brand new.

They had created a military system whereby these well-trained troops could be moved around in battle. Historically, once the battle had joined, it was just chaos. But the Greeks had created a communication system through the blowing of trumpets.

The troops were well-trained. The Greeks could actually move their forces in the chaos of battle. They could move their forces.

That created a tremendous mobility that the Persians simply didn't have. And so, the high training of the Greek soldiers and the tremendous success of the training of the Greek soldiers gave them a completely unexpected military advantage over the Persians. So, Marathon turns out to be an embarrassing loss to the Persians.

And so, this, along with new Greek weapons, meant that the Persians got their introduction to a superior military that they didn't understand. The Greeks had a very long soldier, excuse me, a very long lance that they used in battle so that these mass Greek formations had these long lances that they could use, and they could kill the Persian soldier before the Persian soldier was able to join against them in battle. So, the superior weaponry and mobility of the Greek soldier was called a hoplite.

And so, this superior weaponry gave the Persians a nasty surprise. And so the first battle is won by the Greeks. Now, friends, at the most, there were 25,000 Persian troops.

The Persians lost about 6,400 troops. The loss of 6,400 troops to an empire the size of Persia is not consequential, so Marathon hardly turns out to be one of the epic battles of history.

After all, it was just an average-sized battle. The Persians really suffered an embarrassing defeat. Marathon did not stop the Persians from their wars against the Greeks.

But what Marathon tells the ancient world, tells the Persians in particular, is that you're up against a military group for which you are unprepared. The Persians are not used to this kind of warfare. And quite frankly, what the Greeks will show the world is that their military is going to win and win consistently right through the person of Alexander the Great.

So, with that, the first battle falls to the Greeks. They won't win all of them, but they will win most of them. So, with that, it's perhaps a time to pause.

And here's the reason why: We're going to shift from the battles to Darius's policies, which are of monumental importance. So, with that in mind, let's take a pause, and then we'll come back and turn our attention toward one of the greatest of all the Persian kings, Darius.

Thanks so much for listening.

This is Dr. Don Fowler in his teaching on Old Testament backgrounds. This is session 22, The Persian Empire.