



# The Greatest Battles in History: The Battle of Thermopylae

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Discusses all of the colorful quotes and legends about the battle but also analyzes what is historical fact and what is apocryphal fiction.

\*Explains Thermopylae's legacy from both historical and cultural standpoints.

\*Includes pictures of Thermopylae and historic art depicting Greek and Persian leaders and soldiers.

\*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

“Although extraordinary valor was displayed by the entire corps of Spartans and Thespians, yet bravest of all was declared the Spartan Dienekes. It is said that on the eve of battle, he was told by a native of Trachis that the Persian archers were so numerous that their arrows would block out the sun. Dienekes, however, undaunted by this prospect, remarked with a laugh, ‘Good. Then we will fight in the shade...’ – Herodotus

The names of history’s most famous battles still ring in our ears today, their influence immediately understood by all. Marathon lent its name to the world’s most famous race, but it also preserved Western civilization during the First Persian War. Saratoga, won by one of the colonists’ most renowned war heroes before he became his nation’s most vile traitor. Hastings ensured the Normans’ success in England and changed the course of British history. Waterloo, which marked the reshaping of the European continent and Napoleon’s doom, has now become part of the English lexicon. In Charles River Editors’ Greatest Battles in History series, readers can get caught up to speed on history’s greatest battles in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

There are few battles in history in which the vanquished are better remembered and celebrated than the victors, and even fewer where a defeat is considered a victory. But that has become the enduring legacy of the Battle of Thermopylae, a battle as unique as it is famous. The story of the battle and the willing sacrifice of the Greek defenders to buy the rest of the retreating Greeks time is well known across the world and still resonates with audiences to this day. Last stands are the stuff of martial legends, and Thermopylae is the greatest of them all.

Though there was another contingent of Greeks fighting alongside them, Thermopylae is remembered for the stand of the 300 Spartans, who, with no compulsion binding them, chose to fight and die in the remote mountain pass against insurmountable odds. Their story has been told in literature, art, film, and even in graphic novels.

But the battle was more than the ultimate self-sacrifice, the embodiment of the famous statement that “greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends”. It was also a veritable clash of civilizations, and one that, though in and of itself it was a defeat, helped set the stage for the eventual Greek victory that might very well have changed the course of history. It was a showdown between various Greek city-states, including Sparta and democratic Athens, against the autocratic, absolutist Persian Empire. Had the Persians triumphed, the Golden Age of Athens would have been snuffed out, and Ancient Greece would never have formed the backbone of Roman and Western culture. Simply put, the West as we know it today might never have existed.

The Greatest Battles of History: The Battle of Thermopylae separates the facts from the legends to explain who fought the battle, how the battle was fought, and the results and aftermath of the battle. Along with art depicting important people, places, and events, you will learn about the Battle of Thermopylae like you never have before, in no time at all.

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