

Many battles have been named for the places they were fought. The Civil War, for example, included battles at Bull Run and Gettysburg. Wars themselves, such as the Korean War and the Iraq War, are often named for places as well. This is also true for the Peloponnesian Wars. The Peloponnese is a region of Greece. This region gave its name to a series of wars that raged between Athens and Sparta in the 5th century BCE and that involved nearly every city-state of ancient Greece.



### Two Alliances

Finding two city-states less alike than Athens and Sparta would be difficult. These two cities had very different approaches to life. In Athens, the emphasis was on culture and learning. Athenian citizens enjoyed an early form of democracy. Sparta, on the other hand, was a military society. Men spent most of their lives training for and fighting in wars. Their lives were noted for simplicity and hardship. Spartan government was dominated by the military.

Athens and Sparta had joined to defeat an invading Persian army in 480–479 BCE. Located on the coast, Athens developed a strong navy. Situated 30 miles inland, Sparta was known for its strong army. Each of these powerful states developed alliances with other city-states. The Athenians headed the Delian League. They were a major power around the Aegean Sea. Sparta's allies joined in the Peloponnesian League. The Peloponnese is a peninsula in southern Greece, where Sparta was located.

### How the Peloponnesian Wars Began

The First Peloponnesian War (460–446 BCE) was largely caused by Athenian expansion and Sparta feeling threatened by it. It was mainly a power struggle between Athens and Sparta, who each competed for and interfered with the city-state allies of the other. At the end of the war, the Thirty Years' Peace was declared.

That peace lasted only 15 years, however. Athens formed an alliance with Corcyra, one of Corinth's colonies. The problem was that Corinth was an ally of Sparta. When Corcyra and Corinth went to war, Athens supported Corcyra in violation of the peace agreement. Athens also tried to exclude another colony from selling in the marketplace in Athens, which would have financially ruined the colony. In response to Athens's actions, Sparta threatened war in late summer of 432 BCE. Because battles took place only during spring and summer, war did not actually begin until the following year.

### Pericles of Athens

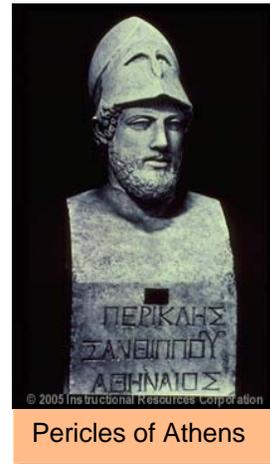
Pericles (who lived around 495–429 BCE) was one of Athens's greatest rulers and the commander of the military. He planned to wear down Sparta and its allies. He used the navy to raid settlements along the Peloponnesian coast. He sent a fleet of 100 triremes, ships with three tiers of rowers, to the coast. Another 30 ships went north to Spartan colonies. The results were mixed, without a clear victor.

Pericles's strategy was to invite all Athenians into the city proper when a siege began. Behind the walls, including a four-mile extension that led to a port, the people would be safe. Protected by the walls, people could still get food. This, however, turned out to be a terrible idea. Athens became overcrowded, and when a plague broke out, the disease spread rapidly. Thousands of Athenians, including Pericles himself, died in the outbreak.

### The Course of the War

With annual invasions and battles, each side had victories in the war. Neither side, however, could claim complete victory. Negotiations resulted in the Peace of Nicias, which began in 421 BCE and stopped the fighting for six years.

Having lost Pericles, the Athenians decided to send a young general, Alcibiades, to fight in Sicily. There were Athenian allies in Sicily that were under siege by Syracuse, the main city in Sicily, which was allied with Sparta. Sicily was home to many resources and was supplying the Spartans with food. If the Athenians could capture Sicily, then they would gain control of its resources, and the Spartans would starve. However, Alcibiades was recalled to Athens on charges of vandalizing statues in Athens. Although he pretended to go along with the plan of returning to Athens, Alcibiades escaped and joined the Spartans.



With full knowledge of the Athenian war plans, Alcibiades was able to help the Spartans. The Athenians in Sicily were defeated. The Athenian men who did not die in battle were sent to work as slaves in the stone quarries. A stone quarry is a large pit where rocks are cut and removed. The rocks were then used in construction projects. It was hard, brutal work.

Although the Athenian government and military struggled in the years following the defeat at Sicily, Athens regained some strength, and the battles continued. Sparta continually proposed peace settlements, but Athens refused to back down. Finally, with help from Persia, the Spartans crushed the navy of Athens at Aegospotami and blocked the Hellespont, the area through which supplies, including food, entered Athens. As a result of this blockade, Athenians began starving to death. In 404 BCE, Athens surrendered. As part of the peace treaty, the Spartans made the Athenians tear down the city walls.

### **Results of the War**

Both Sparta and Athens sustained heavy losses of men and materials during the wars. Many people in their cities and colonies died as a result of the plague and an earthquake in 426 BCE. Others starved because the wars disrupted the farming year. Athens, which had been among the most culturally and politically advanced society of its day, would never regain its former glory. It is for this reason that the wars are considered a turning point in history.

As a result of the wars, the Greek city-states were permanently weakened. In the next century, Philip of Macedon, a foreign king from a state north of Greece, fought against Greece and easily conquered it. The Greek city-states would never again have the power they had once known. However, Greek cultural accomplishments would live on. Alexander, Philip's son, was tutored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. He had a great appreciation for Greek culture and learning. History would remember Alexander the Great for spreading Greek culture throughout his vast empire.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

1. What organizational strategy does the writer use in the section “Two Alliances”?
  - A. comparison/contrast
  - B. time sequence
  - C. cause/effect
  - D. least to greatest importance
2. Based on the information in the map, which of the following powers had allies across the Aegean Sea?
  - A. Melos
  - B. Sparta
  - C. Delios
  - D. Athens
3. Which of the following was an effect of the Peloponnesian Wars?
  - A. A great earthquake destroyed part of Athens.
  - B. Philip of Macedon was easily able to conquer Greece.
  - C. A plague broke out in Athens, killing thousands.
  - D. The Spartans developed a strong navy for defense.
4. Which of the following statements from the passage expresses a fact?
  - A. “Finding two city-states less alike than Athens and Sparta would be difficult.”
  - B. “When Corcyra and Corinth went to war, Athens supported Corcyra in violation of the peace agreement.”
  - C. “Pericles (who lived around 495–429 BCE) was one of Athens’s greatest rulers and the commander of the military.”
  - D. “The Athenian men who did not die in battle were sent to work as slaves in the stone quarries. . . . It was hard, brutal work.”
5. Pericles and Alcibiades were two great generals of the wars. How were they alike and different? Compare and contrast their leadership. Provide evidence from the passage to support your answer.