



0. THEMISTOCLES against XERXES - Story Preface

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When Themistocles urged the Athenians to spend their new-found wealth (from silver) on ships, the people took his advice. They built light, fast vessels known as triremes. This image depicts how those ships likely appeared. Illustration online, [courtesy EDSITEment!](#)

When the Athenians learned what happened at Thermopylae, they knew the road to Athens would be open to Persian invaders. Nearly everyone fled the city before Xerxes arrived.

Some years before, silver had been discovered near Athens. How would this new-found wealth be spent? Themistocles, the Athenian leader, insisted that his city-state must build-up its navy.

On the day Xerxes sacked their city, Athenians must have been greatly relieved at that decision. Most fled to the sea where, sitting in Athenian triremes, evacuees watched smoke rise from the acropolis.

Trusting their oracle, and their leader, Athenians gave up their city. Xerxes ordered Athens destroyed and burnt.

However ... in their lighter and faster ships (this is a virtual battle scene) Athenians, fighting with others at the Straits of Salamis, had a chance to defeat the Persian navy.

Wishing to draw the Persians into a sea battle, Themistocles (it is said by Aeschylus and others) sent an ersatz messenger to tell Xerxes a tall tale. If he wanted to enjoy an easy victory, Xerxes should attack immediately since the Athenians were planning to leave Salamis by dawn.

The Greeks, in other words, were reportedly running away.

Taking the bait, Xerxes and his fleet of slower ships sailed into the bay during the dark of night. By dawn the next morning, the Athenians had not left. Instead, they attacked.

The Persian ships were trapped, thereby losing the naval battle in September of 480 BC. Thermopylae may have been a Spartan defeat, but it directly led to victory at Salamis.

Soon thereafter, the Great King left Greece.

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/THEMISTOCLES-against-XERXES-300-Thermopylae-and-Rise-of-an-Empire>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/THEMISTOCLES-against-XERXES-300-Thermopylae-and-Rise-of-an-Empire>

Questions 2 Ponder

How Did Themistocles Demonstrate Leadership in Ancient Athens?

When Athenians discovered an unexpected source of wealth, their leader—Themistocles—insisted that the funds from the sale of silver had to be used for building-up Athens' defense. Instead of spending their income on “things,” the Athenians spent it to protect themselves.

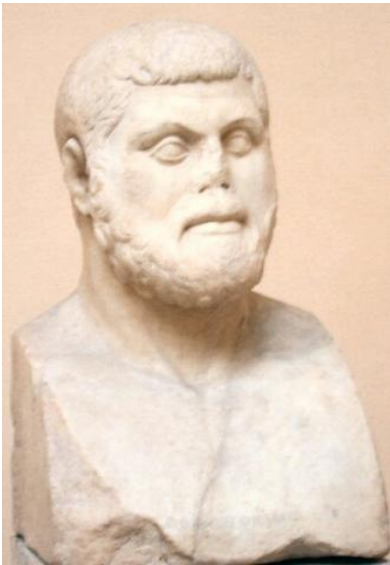
How hard is it to use unexpected money to plan for the future instead of spending for today? Explain your answer.

When Is It Best to Plan for the Future Instead of Spending for Today?

Sometimes it seems that planning for the future provides no benefits for “today.” The Athenians, however, realized that the “future” was much closer to “today” than they may have at-first thought.

Have you ever experienced anything similar—when you saved for something you thought was more important than buying an item of short-term value? Were you relieved you had the discipline to wait? Explain your answers.

Media Stream

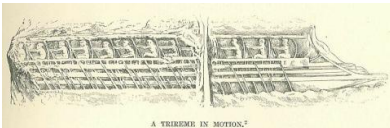


Themistocles - Athenian Leader

Image online, courtesy the livius.org website.

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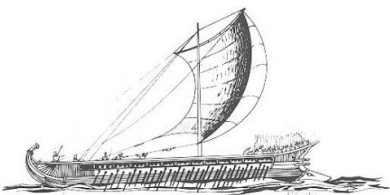
Greek Trireme in Motion

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Athenian Triremes - Key to Persian Defeat

Image online, courtesy Livius.org website.

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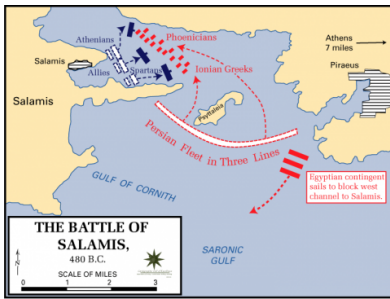
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Acropolis in Athens

Image online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Naval Battle of Salamis

Image online, courtesy U.S. Military Academy.

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Straits of Salamis

Image online, courtesy [livius.org](http://www.livius.org) website.

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Positions at the Battle of Salamis

Map image online, courtesy a Greek-language website.

Image of the Straits of Salamis, by Jona Lendering; License: [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

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Salamis - Persian Ships Trapped

Image online, courtesy [Utah State University](http://www.utahstate.edu) website.

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Naval Battle - Salamis

Image online, courtesy Greek-language history website.

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Map Depicting the Third Persian Invasion

Image online, courtesy U.S. Military Academy (via its Atlases webpage).

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THEMISTOCLES against XERXES

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