The Spartan King Who Led from the Front

Who was King Leonidas?

King Leonidas was the Spartan King from about 490 B.C. until he died in 480 B.C. He is most famous for leading a small group of Greek allies and soldiers at the Battle of Thermopylae in Greece. In his book, “The Legacy of Leonidas I”, T. D. van Basten states, “Throughout history, he has been propped up as the ultimate warrior, who fought with skill and cunning, and was willing to give up his life for the greater good of the country.” By leading from the front, Leonidas could inspire the men amongst him to do whatever it took to achieve their goal, even in moments of inevitable defeat.

A Leader Like No other

King Leonidas led in a way that was never seen before. Leonidas was a transformational leader. According to Emeritus (Jaiswal, 2022), “Transformational leadership is a type of leadership in which leaders encourage and motivate followers to innovate and embrace positive change to grow and shape the organization’s future success.” Leonidas’ way of leading in his final moments gave the country of Greece and the Spartan army a new mentality. After Leonidas’s story of courage and passion spread throughout the country, which lit the flame for the rest of the military and Greece. After Leonidas stood his ground at Thermopylae, all of the soldiers and citizens learned never to surrender or back down. The battle led to the Spartans winning two more battles and effectively ending the Second Persian War.

What Is Leonidas Known For?

As stated, King Leonidas’s most significant leadership moment came in the Battle of Thermopylae. In 480 B.C., Xerxes, the king of Persia, attacked Greece with a large and well-skilled army. There were about 4,000 Greek soldiers and around 80,000 Persian soldiers. Xerxes waited four days before attacking, thinking that the Greeks would surrender. Eventually, Xerxes sent a herald over to the Greek soldiers to have them agree to give up their weapons, to which Leonidas responded with his famous line, “Come and take them!” Xerxes seized an opportunity to circle the Greeks, which led Leonidas to send most of his soldiers off the battlefield to protect against future invasions from Greece. Leonidas and 1,000 other soldiers stayed behind to fight the overpowering Persian Army so the others could escape. Protecting their homeland and values,
every soldier forged forward to their death behind King Leonidas. Leonidas’s acts of bravery and sacrifice were able to influence the rest of the army posthumously.

Why is Leonidas Influential to Me?

King Leonidas is influential because he did not get his army to follow him for the reason most leaders did at the time. After all, they did not fear him or want money for following him. They followed him because he was one of them. Leonidas was running through the battlefield amongst each one of those men. He led from the front. The King did not use his position of power to influence his men. Instead, he impressed them by showing honesty, intelligence, courage, and passion. Leonidas was born into this life, training to be the greatest warrior from a very young age. However, he never let that get to his head. He was no different from any of the other men supporting him. His sacrifice demonstrated Sparta’s willingness to sacrifice itself for the protection of Greece. It reminds me to always fight for what I believe. The way he leads his men is also a way of life that I try to implement into my own. Everyone has their passion, and Leonidas shows that you should fight for whatever your passion is, even when it seems like no hope is left.

Reference List


