

## **BABYLON, CITY OF**

[BAB uh lon]-ancient walled city between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and capital of the Babylonian Empire. **The leading citizens of the nation of Judah were carried to this city as captives about 587 B.C. after Jerusalem fell to the invading Babylonians.** Biblical writers often portrayed this ancient

capital of the Babylonian people as **the model of paganism and idolatry** (Jer 51:44; Dan 4:30).

Babylon was situated along the Euphrates River about 485 kilometers (300 miles) northwest of the Persian Gulf and about 49 kilometers (**30 miles**) **southwest of modern Baghdad in Iraq.** Its origins are unknown.

According to Babylonian tradition, it was built by the god Marduk. The city must have been built some time before **2300 B.C.**, because it was destroyed about that time by an invading enemy king. This makes Babylon one of the oldest cities of the ancient world. **Gen 10:10 mentions Babel as part of the empire of Nimrod.** Some time during its early history, the city of Babylon became a small independent kingdom. Its most famous king was **HAMMURABI** (about 1728-1686 B.C.), who conquered southern Mesopotamia and territory to the north as far as Mari. He was known for his revision of a code of law that showed concern for the welfare of the people under his rule. But the dynasty which he established declined under his successors. It came to an end with the conquest of Babylon by the Hittite king Murshilish I about 1595 B.C. Then the Kassites took over for a period, ruling southern Mesopotamia from the city of Babylon as their capital. The Assyrians attacked and plundered Babylon about 1250 B.C., but it recovered and flourished for another century until the Assyrians succeeded in taking over the city with their superior forces about 1100 B.C. After Tiglath-Pileser I of Assyria arrived on the scene, the city of Babylon became subject to Assyria by treaty or conquest. Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) declared himself king of Babylon with the name Pulu (Pul, 2 Kings 15:19), deporting a number of its citizens to the subdued territory of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 17:24).

In 721 B.C. a Chaldean prince, Marduk-apal-iddin, seized control of Babylon and became a thorn in Assyria's side for a number of years. He apparently planned a large-scale rebellion of eastern and western parts of the Assyrian Empire (2 Kings 20:12). In retaliation against this rebellion, Sennacherib of Assyria (704-681 B.C.) attacked Babylon in 689 B.C., totally destroying it, although it was rebuilt by his successor Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.). After this, Assyrian power gradually weakened, so the city and kingdom of Babylon grew stronger once again.

In 625 B.C. Nabopolassar seized the throne of Babylon. He was succeeded by **Nebuchadnezzar II** (605-562 B.C.), the greatest king of Babylon, who enlarged the capital city to an area of six square miles and beautified it with magnificent buildings. This period of the city's development has been the focal point of all archaeological research done in ancient Babylon. The city's massive double walls spanned both sides of the Euphrates River. Set into these walls were eight major gates. One of the numerous pagan temples in the city was that of the patron god Marduk, flanked by a ZIGGURAT or temple-tower. To this temple a sacred processional way led from the main gate, the Ishtar Gate. Both the gate and the walls facing the way were decorated with colored enameled bricks which were decorated with lions, dragons, and bulls. The city of Babylon also contained a palace complex, or residence for the king. On the northwest side of this palace area, **the famous terraced "hanging gardens"** may have been situated. According to tradition, Nebuchadnezzar built these gardens for one of his foreign wives to remind her of the scenery of her homeland.

Babylon's glory reflected the king's imperial power. Captured kings were brought to his court at Babylon. These included the Judean kings Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:15) and Zedekiah (2 Kings 25:7). During the reign of Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.), while Belshazzar was co-regent (Dan 5), the city surrendered to the Persians without opposition.

Eventually the balance of power passed from the Persians to Alexander the Great of Greece, to whom Babylon willingly submitted in 331 B.C. Alexander planned to refurbish and expand the city and make it his capital, but he died before accomplishing these plans. The city later fell into insignificance because one of Alexander's successors founded a new capital at Seleucia, a short distance away.

In the Old Testament the prophetic books of Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted the downfall of the city of Babylon. This would happen as God's punishment of the Babylonians because of their destruction of Jerusalem and their deportation of the citizens of Judah (Isa 14:22; 21:9; 43:14; Jer 50:9; 51:37). Today, the ruins of this ancient city stand as an eloquent testimony to the passing of proud empires and to the providential hand of God in history.

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