

A Brief History of Babylon

All that remains today of Babylon is a mound in the desert, a simple pile of broken mud-brick buildings and debris. Much to the consternation of religious zealots who are now forced to find a new Babylon to fulfill their joyous prophecies of doom. But at least we know where it is and can begin to put together its true history.

Babylon was the religious center of the Babylonian Empire and later the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Starting as a small village some time in the 3rd millennium BC. Babylon grew in size and influence eventually becoming the namesake of not one but 2 ancient empires. But the exact origins of Babylon are not quite clear cut. The first leader of Akkad Sargon is supposed to have founded Babylon according to Sumerian texts but then many people who read the Bible literally believe that Babylon was founded by Nimrod. In reality the history of Babylon may be much more humble than either of these accounts.

What is known for sure is that it is Hammurabi who makes Babylon something more than another city-state in Mesopotamia. Several times between the time of Hammurabi and the birth of Christ Babylon was the largest city on earth. Babylon may have been the first city to be home to more than 200,000 people.

The Assyrians were the first foreign power to control Babylon approximately between 689 - 626 B.C. The Neo-Babylonian empire then took over control of the City under the leadership of Nabopolassar and it was his son Nebuchadnezzar II who had the famous hanging gardens of Babylon built to make his wife more comfortable. Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder though and the Hanging Gardens were not his only grand achievement. He is also known for the Ishtar gate, which still stands in the ruins of Babylon.

Years later Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon (539 B.C.). The walls around Babylon were said to be impenetrable and Cyrus decided to use his cunning to capture the city instead of brute force. So, during a traditional feast in Babylon, Cyrus had his military engineers divert the flow of the Euphrates river so that his soldiers were able to walk under the river gates and invade the city without having to lay siege to the city for months.

Under Persian rule of Babylon the Jews were allowed to return to Israel and rebuild their temple. Babylon became a regional Capitol and the main administrative center of the Persian empire. Under the Persians Babylon continued to flourish and became a center for learning. Even after Persian rule began to forget about Babylon and the Babylonians themselves three times attempted to rebel Babylon remained under Persian rule.

It was not until the time of Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. Did Babylon change hands once more. When Alexander died several years later in 323 B.C. his generals met at the palace of Nebuchadnezzar to divide the territory conquered by Alexander. From this though Decades of wars began and nearly destroyed Babylon. While Babylon did survive until about 650 A.D. it never regained its glory and only survives today as piles of forgotten building and in the religious texts of various religions.

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