



Assyrian Church Of The East - Los Angeles

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LION OF BABYLON

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Babylon, the legendary city, is indeed, the most famous ancient city in the whole World. It was the capital of ten Mesopotamian dynasties starting with the dynasty of King Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC); the 6th king of the 1st dynasty; reaching prominence as the capital city of the great kingdom of Babylonia. The last dynasty at which Babylon achieved its zenith, is well known particularly of its 2nd king, Nebuchadnezzar II (605-563 BC), to whom most of Babylon's existing buildings belongs.

Babylon was renowned for its high, well-fortified walls and for the magnificence of its temples and palaces. Its famous Hanging Gardens, built by King Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife Amytas, were one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Amytas was a Medes and her home was in mountainous country, so the King reputedly had the Hanging Gardens built to allay her homesickness.

Nowadays, its ruins covers about 30² km lying on the east bank of Euphrates 90 km south of [Baghdad](#) and about 10 km north of Hilla. The most important of the standing monuments of Babylon today are the Summer and Winter Palaces of King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Ziggurat attached to it, the Street of Processions, the Lion of Babylon, and the famous Ishtar Gate.

In Akkadian times, around 2350 BC, Babylon was a small village, which in 5 or 6 centuries had grown in size and importance, mostly during the reign of the 3rd Dynasty, until it rose like a city meteor to deal the coup de grace to Sumerian authority in Mesopotamia under Amorite kings. Babylon itself became a major city-state, as the capital of the great Amorite soldier, the famous king, law-giver and social reformer King Hammurabi, with a code of common law, and a king with genuine concern for the well-being of his subjects- an unusual feature in those times.

Hammurabi's lasting monument is the Code. It was inscribed on eight-foot steles, like the eight-foot black diorite stela, pillaged from Babylon by an Elamite King and found in 1901 by French archaeologists in Susa, the ancient Elamite capital (to the east of modern Amara). The French transported it to the Louvre where you can see it and read, in Babylonian cuneiform writing, the 3000 lines of the Code.

In the next thousand years or so it witnessed the growth of other Mesopotamian cities which surpassed it in

power and influence until, in the 2nd Chaldean Kingdom (625-538 BC) it flourished again as the capital of a mighty and prosperous country. King Nebuchadnezzar II rebuilt it in accordance with a new plan that took special care of its fortifications, and Babylon thus became the largest and loveliest city of its time.

As he was pursuing his conquests, Alexander the Great stopped for a time in Babylon and had intended to rebuild. He later returned only to die in it in 322 BC. Seleucus Nicator I, one of his commanders and successors, built Seleucia, south of Baghdad, whereupon Babylon lost its political significance.

Penetrated by the Euphrates from north to south, Babylon was surrounded by a moat and a double wall: the outer wall was 16 km long, the inner, 8 km. Straight, wide streets intercrossed, all paved with bricks and bitumen. The most important was the Street of Processions, which passed through Ishtar's Gate and ended in the Stepped Tower. The remains of this street with its bituminous paving are still there to be seen today.

Nebuchadnezzar's Southern Palace (190 x 300 m) is situated on the west side of this major street, made up of five courtyards each surrounded by halls and a diversity of chambers, one of which is the throne room (52 x 25 m). The Hanging Gardens, the remains of which are still visible nowadays, were part of this palace.

The Lion of Babylon, large and splendidly carved in basalt, reminds us again that the lion was the symbol of the goddess Ishtar. In the sculpture, the lion's back has marks indicating that it was meant for a precious saddle upon which the goddess Ishtar would stand.

To the south of the Street of Processions is a major temple, the Esagila "The Lofty House", leading on to the site of the Stepped Tower of Babylon, which had seven levels rising to a height of 91 meters, on a square base also 91 meters square. The Street runs straight until the bridge across the Euphrates, which rested on bastions 9 meters thick each.

Another temple in the area is Nabushcari, recently dug up with painted murals, the largest temple of its time. And, as you cross the railway line to the city, you will see a rise, which originally was 18 m high with a palace built on it, which archaeologists call the summer palace of Nebuchadnezzar. In the upper parts of the back walls are ventilation apertures, which served the inner rooms and halls of the palace.

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