

[Back](#)

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Babylon

The Neo-Babylonian Empire began in 626 B.C., when the military leader Nabopolassar, probably a Chaldean, became king of Babylon. Nabopolassar won control of Babylonia from the Assyrians. Then, from 612 to 609 B.C., he aggressively attacked Assyria with the aid of allies from Media. These attacks resulted in the end of the Assyrian Empire, and Nabopolassar gained control of Assyrian territory in present-day Syria, Israel, Lebanon, and Egypt. He ruled until his death in 605 B.C.

Babylon achieved its greatest glory under Nabopolassar and his son Nebuchadnezzar II, who rebuilt the city on a grand scale. During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.), workers constructed thick defensive walls and a moat around Babylon. People entered and left the city through eight bronze gates in the walls. The grandest of these, the Ishtar Gate, was on the north side of the city. Figures of dragons, lions, and bulls made of glazed colored brick decorated the gate and nearby walls.

The Euphrates River flowed from north to south through the center of Babylon, which was shaped like a rectangle. The city's major structures stood east of the river. They included a royal palace, two fortresses, the Temple of Marduk, and a *ziggurat* (pyramid-shaped tower). A paved avenue called the Processional Street, parallel to and east of the river, led from the Temple of Marduk to the site of a great religious festival north of the city. It passed out of the city through the Ishtar Gate. The ancient Greeks wrote about elevated gardens they called the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. However, evidence of the gardens has never been found in Babylon's ruins.

As many as 200,000 people may have lived in Babylon and its suburban communities. Agriculture and manufacturing flourished in the city. During this period, Babylon developed investment and banking markets which became the most important in the world.



Picture
Hanging
Gardens of
Babylon

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