



Once there was a Babylonian Empire which, when it existed, was the most-powerful of all states in the ancient world. It came into being after the fall of the Assyrians, around 612 B.C.

The capital city of the empire was Babylon. Its famous king, Nebuchadnezzar, ordered his workers to build many structures which became famous. The empire expanded from the end of the sixth century, B.C., into the seventh century, B.C.

Around 539 B.C., Cyrus the Great—King of the Persians—overthrew the Babylonian Empire. Despite the empire’s misfortunes, Babylon itself remained an important center of culture. Even today, Babylon is a key city in the country we know as Iraq.

Many, many years before the Babylonian Empire came into being, a famous king called Hammurabi ruled in the area. It was Hammurabi whose Law Code was used to establish rights and responsibilities between people (and people with their government).

Hammurabi’s legal code contained such laws as “an eye for an eye.”

After Cyrus attacked and captured Babylon, he made his son Cambyses viceroy. The Babylonians, however, did not remain passive under Persian rule. They rebelled numerous times, including as late as 336-335 B.C. (under their leader Nidin-Bêl).

The area of the Babylonian Empire included land adjacent to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers known as “The Fertile Crescent” (because of its shape and crop-growing ability). In addition, it included the territory of Babylonian-conquered countries we know today as Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Israel.

It was the Babylonians, going back to before the time of Hammurabi, who invented the writing script called cuneiform. We still have examples of cuneiform writing, including Hammurabi’s Law Code.

In the mid-19th century, scholars began to understand cuneiform, and the languages which used this writing form. That, in turn, led to a better understanding of the people who lived in Babylon so many years ago.

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