

In 2011, I noted that the *New York Times* had published an **intriguing article** on Iraqi efforts to preserve, protect, restore and then rebuild the ancient city of Babylon and make it a draw for tourists, with U.S. taxpayer assistance. The *Times* reports that a modern Babylon museum will open later this month. *Times*' reporter Steven Lee Myers also posted a **fascinating four minute video walking through some of the rebuilt ruins of Babylon**, and explaining Iraqi efforts to protect and restore numerous Biblical sites.

"The Babylon project is Iraq's biggest and most ambitious by far, a reflection of the ancient city's fame and its resonance in Iraq's modern political and cultural heritage," the *Times* reported, noting that "in November, the State Department announced a new \$2 million grant to begin work to preserve the site's most impressive surviving ruins. They include the foundation of the Ishtar Gate, built in the sixth century B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar's father, Nabopolassar, and adorned with brick reliefs of the Babylonian gods Marduk and Adad."

"The American reconstruction team has refurbished a modern museum on the site, as well as a model of the Ishtar Gate that for decades served as a visitors' entrance. Inside the museum is one of the site's most valuable relics: a glazed brick relief of a lion, one of 120 that once lined the processional way into the city.

The museum, with three galleries, is scheduled to open this month, receiving its first visitors since 2003. And with new security installed,

talks are under way to return ancient Babylonian artefacts from the National Museum in Baghdad.

The fate of Babylon is already being disputed by Iraqi leaders, with **antiquities officials clashing with local authorities** over when to open it to visitors and how to exploit the site for tourism that, for the most part, remains a goal more than a reality. Even now they are clashing over whether the admission fee should go to the antiquities board or the provincial government."

BABYLON'S FUTURE

Just as Babylon has played an important role in past history, so she is scheduled by God- as revealed in prophecy- to play a central role in the future. Babylon will likely become the capital for the antichrist during the coming seven-year tribulation.

End-times prophecy demands that Babylon be rebuilt and become an important city in world affairs during the tribulation. Isaiah 13:19 says, **" And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah."** The context of Isaiah 13 is **" the day of the Lord,"** the most common Old Testament term for our more widely know term of the tribulation.

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Rebuilding Babylon



Prophetic Significance

Bible prophecy indicates that in the End Times, the nation we know today as the Republic of Iraq — known variously in Scripture as Babel, Babylon, Babylonia, Mesopotamia and Shinar — will emerge as the global centre of wealth, power and terrible evil. Eventually Iraq will pose a direct and existential threat to the State of Israel, particularly during the Tribulation.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein and his regime in 2003, Iraq has not been a regional threat, much less a danger to Israel. Some have assumed, therefore, that Iraq would no longer play a major role in Middle Eastern or global affairs in the future. But such a conclusion would be a mistake. Those who read, understand and believe Bible prophecy have been watching for Iraq to:

- 1) Begin rebuilding its offensive military capability;
- 2) Begin rebuilding its economy;

- 3) Continue rebuilding the ancient city of Babylon into a major centre of commerce and tourism.

Interestingly, all three developments are currently underway.

IRAQ IS REBUILDING ITS MILITARY

Now that the Iraqi government has forced the American military out of their country, they have embarked on a dramatic arms build-up, including the purchase of American weapons systems that could be used for offensive purposes in the future. Examples:

- **The Iraqis are buying 140 state-of-the-art American M1A1 combat tanks.** “The Government of Iraq has purchased 140 tanks from the United States, all of which have arrived in Iraq,” **reports an Iraqi business website**. “131 of those tanks are already in the possession of the Iraqi Army. The nine remaining tanks are in Iraq, but in U.S. possession.”
- **The Iraqis are buying 36 advanced American F-16 fighter jets.** “Israel is monitoring Iraq’s rearmament program, particularly Bagdad’s acquisition of 36 Lockheed Martin F-16s, with some disquiet amid intelligence reports Iran is consolidating its influence in Iraq following the U.S. military withdrawal,” **reports UPI**. “Baghdad ordered the F-16 Block 52 multi-role Fighting Falcon jets — enough to equip the Iraqi air force’s first two fighter squadrons — in two 18-plane batches in 2011 at an estimated total cost of \$7 billion.”

- **In 2010, the Iraqis embarked on a \$13 billion weapons spending spree.** “Iraq is preparing to buy as much as \$13 billion in American arms and military equipment, a huge order of tanks, ships and hardware that U.S. officials say shows Iraqi-U.S. military ties will be tight for years to come,” **reported USA Today**. “‘It helps to build their capabilities, first and foremost; and second, it builds our strategic relationship for the future,’ said Army Lt. Gen. Michael Barbero, the ranking U.S. officer responsible for training and advising Iraq forces.”

IRAQ IS REBUILDING ITS ECONOMY

Now that the war of liberation is over and most of Iraq has been pacified and stabilized from the terrorist insurgency, Iraq’s economy is not only growing but is poised for hyper-growth. Analysts expect Iraq’s GDP to grow by more than 9% annually for the next few years, and expect Iraq’s oil production to nearly triple by 2017.

- “Iraq’s gross domestic product is expected to grow by an average rate of at least 9.4 percent annually between 2012 and 2016 as the oil-producing country benefits from larger windfalls in oil revenues, a senior central bank official said [in February],” **reports Reuters**. “Iraq, which has the fourth-biggest oil reserves in the world, is currently producing around 2.9 million barrels per day (bpd). Iraq’s oil minister said last year he expected production to reach between 8-8.5 million bpd by 2017.”

- Some analysts within the Iraqi Planning Ministry believe Iraq could reach a **47% growth rate by 2017**, once the oil starts flowing fast and furious.
- More and more major international companies are signing deals to do business in Iraq — see this **intriguing list published by Reuters**, published in December 2011.
- In 2011, ExxonMobil — the world’s largest oil company — signed a **major deal** to help develop the oil industry in Iraq’s northern region of Kurdistan. Despite the fact being **mired in some political controversy**, the deal is likely to be fully ratified in the not-too-distant future.
- Also in 2011, Royal Dutch Shell signed a **\$17 billion deal** to help Iraq develop its enormous lucrative oil industry in its southern regions.
- In 2010, the Iraqi government ratified **four other major oil deals**.

IRAQ IS REBUILDING BABYLON

Largely overlooked by Westerners is the fact that the government of Iraq is moving forward with plans to protect the archaeological remains of the ancient City of Babylon, in preparation for building a modern city of Babylon. Originally started by the late Saddam Hussein — is aimed eventually at attracting scores of “cultural tourists” from all over the world to see the glories of Mesopotamia’s most famous city. What’s more, the Obama Administration has actually helped contribute U.S. taxpayer dollars to “The Future of Babylon Project” through the State Department’s budget.