

## The Epic of Atrahāsīs

There were two ranks of Sumerian gods: the Anunnaki & the Igigi. The Igigi were the slaves of the Anunnaki, who'd imposed hard labor on the Igigi. The hard labor became far too *difficult* for the Igigi, who then threatened *to rebel* against the Anunnaki. In order to prevent the rebellion the Anunnaki freed the Igigi from slavery. Yet, the tiring work that the Anunnaki had imposed on the Igigi still had to be done.



The great gods needed workers, so the Anunnaki's fertility goddess Nintu created workers by mixing *clay* together with the *blood* of the intelligence god We-ila, who had been sacrificially slaughtered for that very purpose. (Alas, human beings are the intelligent workers that Nintu had made out of a mixture of *clay* & the god We-ila's *blood*!)

Only 1,200 years after the goddess Nintu had created human beings, they were so noisy that the Anunnaki's chief god Enlil was unable to sleep, and so he decided to exterminate them with a Great Flood. Yet before Enlil could do so, the Anunnaki's friendly god Enki warned one human being: Atrahāsīs. Thanks to Enki's warning, Atrahāsīs promptly built a boat, which had allowed Atrahāsīs, his family, and their livestock to survive the Flood. Hence since they were the only humans who survived the Great Flood, every human ever since then has been a descendent of Atrahāsīs. After the Flood, Enlil deeply regretted his decision to exterminate human beings, so the great god granted Atrahāsīs the gift of immortality. Yet, the children of Atrahāsīs didn't inherit his gift, nor did any of their descendants.

## Questions about the *Epic of Atrahasis*

1. In the *Epic of Atrahasis*, what was the very first problem that any of the Anunnaki ever had faced?
2. In the *Epic of Atrahasis*, the Igigi threatened to rebel against the Anunnaki. How did the Anunnaki solve that problem? (In other words, how the the Anunnaki prevent a rebellion by the Igigi?)
3. In the *Epic of Atrahasis*, the Anunnaki freed the Igigi from slavery, but the emancipation of the Igigi by the Anunnaki immediately presented a new problem that urgently needed to be solved. What was that problem? (Hint: Consider the reason *why* the Igigi had been slaves in the first place.)





10. In many ways, the *Epic of Atrahasis* is a story about how, by solving one problem, a new problem is created. Yet if that is indeed a key motif in the story, the motif would raise certain questions about the story's ending. Out of remorse (if not also regret), the great god Enlil made Atrahasis immortal, but was it *just* (or *right*) for Enlil to have done so? *Why* or why *not*? Explain. [To supplement your explanation, fill out the following table (as best as you can) on the pros & cons of immortality.]

# Immortality

***Pros (Advantages)***

***Cons (Disadvantages)***