# The great Flood: the Epic of Atrahasis



The **Great Flood:** mythological story about a great destruction that once befell the earth. There are several variants; the Biblical version is the most famous. The possibility that there is a [historical event](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood5.html) behind the story (a local flood in southern [Babylonia](http://www.livius.org/ba-bd/babylon/babylonia.html) in the twenty-eighth century BCE) can not be excluded.

The[*Epic of Atrahasis*](http://www.livius.org/as-at/atrahasis/atrahasis.html) is the fullest Mesopotamian account of the Great Flood. The text is known from several versions: two written by [Assyrian](http://www.livius.org/as-at/assyria/assyria.html) scribes (one in the Assyrian, one in the [Babylonian](http://www.livius.org/ba-bd/babylon/babylonia.html) dialect), the third one (on three tablets) was written during the reign of king Ammi-saduqa of Babylonia (1647-1626 BCE).

The story of the Flood is the final part of this epic, which starts with complaints by the Lesser Gods, who refuse to work any longer. Humankind is created, but men make so much noise, that the gods decide to wipe them out. The plan to send a Deluge, however, is betrayed by the god Enki, who sends a dream to Atrahasis.

Parts are quoted in [Tablet XI](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood3-t-gilgamesh.html) of the *Epic of Gilgameš*. The translation offered here is adapted from the one by B.R. Foster.

**Atrahasis' Dream Explained**

**[i.b35]** Enlil committed an evil deed against the people.

**[i.c.11]** Atrahasis made ready to speak,
and said to his lord:
"Make me know the meaning of the dream.
let me know, that I may look out for its consequence."
**[i.c15]** Enki made ready to speak,
and said to his servant:
"You might say, 'Am I to be looking out while in the bedroom?'
Do you pay attention to message that I speak for your:
**[i.c20]** '[Wall, listen to me](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#1)!
Reed wall, pay attention to all my words!
[Flee the house](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%224), [build a boat](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#3),
 forsake possessions, and save life.
**[i.c25]** The boat which you build
... be equal ...
...
...
[Roof her over like the Apsu](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%226), [i.e., the firmament in the primordial waters]
**[i.c30]** so that the sun shall not see inside her.
Let her be roofed over fore and aft.
The gear should be very strong,
the pitch should be firm, and so give the boat strength.
I will shower down upon you later
**[i.c35]** [a windfall of birds](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#10), a spate of fishes.'"
He opened the water clock and filled it,
he told it of [the coming of the seven-day deluge](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#7).

**Atrahasis and the Elders**

Atrahasis received the command.
He assembled the Elders at his gate.
**[i.c.40]** Atrahasis made ready to speak,
[and said to the Elders](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%228):
"My god does not agree with your god,
Enki and Enlil are constantly angry with each other.
They have expelled me from the land.
**[i.c45]** Since I have always reverenced Enki,
he told me this.
[I can not live in your city](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%229)
Nor can I set my feet on the earth of Enlil.
I will dwell with my god in the depths.
**[i.c50]** This he told me: ..."

**Construction of the Ark**

**[ii.10]** The Elders ...
[The carpenter carried his axe,
the reedworker carried his stone,
the rich man carried the pitch,
the poor man brought the materials needed.](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%2211)

[Lacuna of about fifteen lines; the word *Atrahasis* can be discerned.]

**Boarding of the Ark**

Bringing ...
**[ii.30]** whatever he had ...
Whatever he had ...
Pure animals he slaughtered, cattle ...
Fat animals he killed. Sheep ...
he choose and and brought on board.
**[ii.35]** An abundance of birds flying in the heavens,
the cattle and the ... of the cattle god,
[the creatures of the steppe](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%2214),
... he brought on board
...
**[ii.40]** he invited his people
... to a feast
... [his family was brought on board](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#13).
While one was eating an another was drinking,
**[ii.45]** he went in and out; he could not sit, could not kneel,
for his heart was broken, he wat retching gall.

**Departure**

The outlook of the weather changed.
[The storm god] Adad began to roar in the clouds.
**[ii.50]** The god they heard, his clamor.
[He brought pitch to seal his door](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%2215).
By the time he had bolted his door,
Adad was roaring in the clouds.
The winds were furious as he set forth,
**[ii.55]** [He cut the mooring rope](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#16) and released the boat.

[Lacuna]

**The Great Flood**

**[iii.5]** ... the storm
... were yoked
Anzu rent the sky with his talons,
He ... the land
**[iii.10]** and [broke its clamor like a pot](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#18).
... [the flood came forth.
Its power came upon the peoples like a battle](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#a),
[one person did not see another,
they could not recognize each other in the catastrophe](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html%22%20%5Cl%20%2219).
**[iii.15]** [The deluge belowed like a bull](http://www.livius.org/fa-fn/flood/flood6-parallels.html#17),
The wind resounded like a screaming eagle.
The darkness was dense, the sun was gone,
... like flies.
**[iii.20]** the clamor of the deluge.

[Lacuna. The gods find themselves hungry because there are no farmers left and sacrifices are no longer brought. When they discover that Atrahasis has survived, they make a plan to make sure that the noise will remain within limits: they invent childbirth, infant mortality, and celibacy.]

**[iii.45]** Enki made ready to speak,
and said to Nintu the birth goddess:
"You, birth goddess, creatress of destinies,
establish death for all peoples!
...
**[iii.d1]** "Now then, let there be a third woman among the people,
among the people are the woman who has borne
and the woman who has not borne.
Let there be also among the people the *pasittu* (she-demon):
**[iii.d5]** let her snatch the baby from the lap who bore it.
And etablish high priestesses and priestesses,
let them be taboo [celibate], and so cut down childbirth.

