

## Atrahasis

Narrator: When the gods instead of men bore the work and suffered the toil – the toil of the gods became too great, the work was heavy, the distress was too much. The Seven great Anunnaki made the IGIGI suffer the work. Anu, their father, was the king; their counselor was the warrior Enlil; their chamberlain was Ninurta; and their canal-controller, Ennugi.

The gods had clasped hands together, had cast lots, and had divided the realms. Anu had gone up to heaven, and the gods of the great watery deep [Apsu] had gone below the earth. The Annunaki of the sky made the IGIGI bear the workload. The gods had to dig out canals, had to clear the channels, the lifelines of the land. The IGIGI had to dig out canals, had to clear the channels, the lifelines of the land. The gods dug out the Tigris riverbed and then dug out the Euphrates. All the mountains watched and took count of the years of the toil. For 3,600 years they bore the excessively hard work, suffering night and day.

### [SCENE 1]

IGIGI (complaining, backbiting, and grumbling): Let us confront our taskmaster, the chamberlain, that he may relieve us of our heavy work. We can target the counselor of the gods, the hero, come let us unnerve him in his dwelling! Enlil, the counselor of the gods, the hero, come, let us unnerve him in his dwelling!

One representative IGIGI (opening his mouth wide to address his divine brothers, the IGIGI): Let us kill him, let us break the yoke. Enlil, the counselor of the gods, the hero, come let us unnerve him in his dwelling! Now, proclaim war, let us mingle hostilities and battle.

Narrator: The divine IGIGI gods heeded his words. They set fire to their tools, fire to their spades, they put flame to their hods. They held the burning tools as they went to the gate of the shrine of the warrior Enlil. It was night. Halfway through the temple-watch. The temple was surrounded, but the god did not know. It was night. Halfway through the temple-watch. The temple was surrounded, but the god did not know.

[Stop motion paper craft]: Kalkal, the gate-keeper, observed it and was disturbed. He slid the bolt closed and watched the gate. Kalkal roused Nusku and they listened to the noise of the IGIGI's roar. Nusku roused is lord, he got him out of his bed.

Nusku (the chief temple personnel to Enlil): My lord, your temple is surrounded. A rabble is running around your door. The battle has come right up to your gate.

Narrator: Enlil had weapons brought to his dwelling.

Enlil (opening his mouth to address his vizier Nusku): Nusku, bar your gate, take up your weapons and stand before me.

Narrator: Nusku barred his gate, took his weapons and stood before Enlil.

Nusku (opening his mouth to address the warrior Enlil): My lord, your face is sallow as tamarisk. Why do you fear your own sons? O Enlil, your face is sour as tamarisk. Why do you fear your own sons? Send that Anu be fetched down and that Enki be brought to your presence.

Narrator: He sent and Anu was fetched down to him. Enki was also brought into his presence. Anu, king of heaven, was present. King of the Apsu, Enki, was in attendance. The Seven great Annunaki were present. Enlil arose.

Enlil (opening his mouth to address the great gods): Is it against me that they have risen up? Must I engage in battle? What did my very own eyes see? A rabble was running around my door. This battle has come right up to my gate!

Anu (opening his mouth to address Enlil): Let Nusku go out and ascertain the reason why the IGIGI have surrounded your gate. Then give a command to your sons.

Enlil: (opening his mouth to address vizier Nusku): Nusku, open your gate. Take your weapons.

Narrator: Nusku opened his door and took up his weapons. [time passes] In the assembly of the gods he bowed, then stood and reported the message.

Nusku: Your father, Anu, your counselor warrior Enlil, your chamberlain Ninurta, and your canal controller Ennugi have sent me to say, 'Who is in charge of the rabble? Who is in charge of the fighting? Who declared war? Who ran to the door of Enlil? Every single one of us gods declared war! We have put a stop to the digging. The load is

excessive, it is killing us! Out work is too hard, the trouble too much!  
So every one of us gods has agreed to complain to Enlil...'

Narrator: Enlil listened to that speech. His tears flowed. Enlil spoke guardedly, addressing the warrior Anu.

Enlil (to Anu): Noble one, take a decree with you to the sky, show your strength – while the Anunnaki are sitting before you call up one IGIGI god and let them cast him for destruction!

Anu (opening his mouth to address to the gods, his brothers): What are we complaining of? Their work was indeed too hard, their trouble was too much. Every day the earth produced a disgruntled noise. The warning signal was loud enough, we kept hearing the noise. Belet-ili the womb goddess (a divine midwife, aka Nintu) is present, let the womb goddess create offspring, and let man bear the yoke of the gods.

Nintu (opening her mouth to address the gods): It is not proper for me to make man. The work is Enlil's to plan. He makes everything pure. If he gives me clay, then I will do it.

Enki (opening his mouth to address the gods): On the first, seventh, and the fifteenth of the month I shall make a purification by washing. Then one IGIGI god should be slaughtered. And the gods can be purified by immersion. Nintu shall mix the clay with his flesh and his blood. Then an IGIGI god and a man will be mixed together in clay. Let us hear the drumbeat forever after, let a ghost come into existence from the god's flesh, let her proclaim it as his living sign, and let the ghost exist so as not to forget the slain god.

Narrator: Then all the great gods answered, "Yes" in the assembly, the great Anunnaki who assign the fates.

[SCENE 2]

Narrator: On the first, seventh, and fifteenth of the month Enki made a purification by washing. Ilawela, one of the IGIGI who had intelligence, they slaughtered in their assembly. Nintu mixed clay with his flesh and blood. They heard the drumbeat forever after. A ghost came into existence from the god's flesh, and she proclaimed it as his living sign. The ghost existed so as not to forget the slain god. After she had mixed that clay, she called up the Anunnaki, the great gods, who all spat spittle upon the clay.

Nintu (aka, Mami, opened her mouth to address the great gods): I have carried out perfectly the work that you ordered of me. You have slaughtered a god together with his intelligence. I have relieved you of your hard work. I have imposed your load upon man. You have bestowed the noise, all the complaining, backbiting, and grumbling onto mankind. I have undone the fetter on your feet and granted you freedom.

Narrator: They listened to this speech of hers, and were freed from anxiety, and kissed her feet.

All Anunnaki: We used to call you Mami / Nintu / Belet-ili but now your name shall be Mistress of All Gods.

Narrator: Far-sighted Enki and wise Nintu went into the room of fate. The goddesses were assembled. He trod the clay in her presence. She repeatedly recited an incantation, for Enki who had remained in her presence, made her recite it. When she had finished her incantation, she pinched off fourteen pieces of clay, and set seven pieces on the right, seven on the left. Between them she put down a mud brick. She made use of a reed and opened it to cut the umbilical cord. Then she called up the wise and knowledgeable womb goddesses, seven and seven. Seven created males. Seven created females, for the womb goddess is creator of fate... The womb goddesses were assembled and Nintu was present. She counted the months, called up the tenth month as the term of the fates. When the tenth month came, she slipped in a staff and opened the womb. Her face was glad and joyful. She covered her head, performed the midwifery, put on her belt. She said a blessing, girded her loins and drew a pattern in the flour and placed the brick upon it.

Nintu (finishing the blessing): I have created. My hands have made humans. Let the midwife rejoice in the prostitute's house. Where the pregnant woman gives birth and the mother of the babe severs the cord from herself, let the brick be in place for nine days, that Nintu the birth-goddess, may be honored. Without ceasing, praise Nintu the birth-goddess. Then, when the bed is laid, let the wife and her husband lie together. When, to institute marriage, they heed Ishtar in the house of the father-in-law, let there be rejoicing for nine days, let them call Ishtar Ishhara.

[SCENE 3 – after a gap in the text]

Narrator: The humans are mature. They began their work. They made new picks and spades to dig out big canals to feed people and sustain the gods. 600 years passed, followed by less than 600 years, and the country became too wide, the people too numerous. The country was as noisy as a bellowing bull. The god grew restless at their racket, Enlil had to listen to their noise.

Enlil (opening his mouth to address to great gods): The noise of mankind has become too much, I am losing sleep over their racket. Give out the order that shuruppu, the disease of chills and fever, shall break out.

Narrator: Now there was one man, Atrahasis whose ear was open to his god Enki. He would speak with his god and his god would speak with him.

Atrahasis (opened his mouth to address Enki, his lord): How long will the gods make us suffer disease? Will they make us suffer these chills and fever forever?

Enki (opened his mouth to address Atrahasis): Continue making noise. Make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the plague, Namtara, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand to stop the disease.

Atrahasis (opened his mouth to address the elders at his gate): Elders, make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the plague, Namtara, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand to stop the disease.

Narrator: The elders harkened to the words of Atrahasis. They built a temple for Namtara in the city. They commanded the heralds to proclaim the news.

Heralds (to the countryside): Make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the plague, Namtara, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand to stop the disease.

Narrator: ...and the plague left them. They could return to their life and work.

[SCENE 4]<sup>1</sup>

Narrator: Twelve-hundred years had not yet passed when the land extended and the peoples multiplied. The land was bellowing like a bull, the god got disturbed with their uproar. Enlil heard their noise and was disturbed.

Enlil (opening his mouth to address to great gods): The noise of mankind has become too intense for me. I am losing sleep over their racket. Cut off supplies for the peoples, let there be scarcity of plant life to satisfy their hunger. Adad should withhold his rain, and below the flood should not come up from its abyss. Let the wind blow and parch the ground. Let the clouds thicken but not release a downpour. Let the fields diminish their yields, let Nisaba stop up her breast. There must be no rejoicing among them, let their festivals be suppressed.

Narrator: Above, the rains did not fall. Below, the flood did not rise from the abyss. The womb of the earth did not bear, vegetation did not sprout up. People were not seen. The black fields became white, the broad plain was choked with salt. For one year, the people ate couch grass; for the second year they suffered the itch. The third year came, their features were altered by hunger. Their faces were encrusted like malt, and they were living on the verge of death. Their faces appeared green, they walked hunched in the street. Their broad shoulders became narrow, their long legs became short.

Atrahasis (opened his mouth to address Enki, his lord): How long will the gods make us suffer drought and famine? Will they make us suffer forever?

Narrator: Enki became fed up with sitting in the assembly of the gods. Laughter overcame him.

Enki (opened his mouth to address Atrahasis): Continue making noise. Make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the rain-storm, Adad, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of

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<sup>1</sup> The drought / famine appears to proceed twice. However, since the second account is quite broken, its details are merged with the previous to produce scene 4.

sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand. Then, he may rain down a mist in the morning and may furtively rain down dew in the night, so that the fields will bear grain.

Atrahasis (opened his mouth to address the elders at his gate): Elders, Make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the rain-storm, Adad, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand. Then, he may rain down a mist in the morning and may furtively rain down dew in the night, so that the fields will bear grain.

Narrator: The elders harkened to the words of Atrahasis. They built a temple for Adad in the city. They commanded the heralds to proclaim the news.

Heralds (to the countryside): Make a loud noise in the land. But do not reverence your gods. Give them neither offerings nor prayers. Instead, find the god of the rain-storm, Adad, and bring a baked loaf to his door. An offering of sesame meal may be pleasing to him. He will be shamed by the gift and will lift his hand. Then, he may rain down a mist in the morning and may furtively rain down dew in the night, so that the fields will bear grain.

Narrator: In the morning, Adad rained down a mist and furtively rained down dew in the night. The fields bore grain and the famine left them. Their prosperity returned.

## [SCENE 5]

Narrator: Meanwhile, the Seven great Anunnuki met to re-establish rule among them. Enlil declared the order of things.

Enlil: Anu and Adad guard the upper regions. I guard the lower earth. I am furious with the IGI. The humans are too loud. But you, Enki, everywhere you go, you loosen the yoke and establish freedom, first for the IGI and now for humans. [Turning to all the gods] Let us bind prince Enki with an oath.

Enki (opening his mouth to address the gods): Why will you bind me with an oath? Am I to lay my hands on my own people, the ones I helped create? The flood that you are preparing, is it for me to mete out?

Am I to lay my hands on my own people? Am I to give birth to the flood? That is the task of Enlil. Let him come and choose among us, Anunnaki and lower gods to rage in storm clouds, to tear up the mooring poles, to make the dikes overflow.

Narrator: Thus the gods commanded total destruction. Enlil did an evil deed against humanity.

Atrahasis (opening his mouth to address his lord):

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Atrahasis (opening his mouth to address his lord): Teach me the meaning of the dream I had, that I may seek its outcome.

Enki (opening his mouth to address his slave, Atrahasis): You say, 'what am I to seek?' Observe the message that I will speak to you. Wall, listen to me! Reed wall, observe all my words! Destroy your house and build a boat. Abandon property and save life. The boat you build, its measures should be equal. [...broken...] Roof it over like the great deep so that the sun shall not see inside it. Let it be roofed over above and below. The tackle should be very strong, let the pitch be tough, and so give the boat strength. I will rain down upon you here an abundance of birds, a profusion of fishes.

Narrator: Enki opened the waterclock and filled it, readying it to measure seven days until the coming of the flood. Meanwhile, the elders of Atrahasis' city had consulted with other gods and received different advice concerning the coming cataclysm.

Atrahasis (opening his mouth to address the elders of his city): My god does not agree with your god. Enki and Enlil are angry with each other. They have expelled me from my house since I revere Enki. He told me of this matter. I cannot do as you plan. I cannot set my feet on the earth of Enlil.

Narrator: So Atrahasis made ready his boat. The carpenter carried his ax. The reed worker carried his stone. The child carried the pitch. The poor men brought what was needed. Bringing whatever he had, clean animals, fat animals, he caught and put on board the winged birds of the heavens, the cattle, the wild creatures, he put them all on board. As the moon began to disappear, he invited his people, his workers and family to a banquet. He sent his family on board. They ate and drank. But he was in and out. He could not sit, could not crouch, for his heart was broken and he was vomiting gall. The appearance of the weather began to change. Adad roared in the clouds. As soon as



he heard Adad's voice pitch was brought for Atrahasis to close his door. After he had bolted the door Adad was roaring in the clouds, the winds became savage as he arose, he severed the mooring line and set the boat adrift.

The storm raged. Zu, with his talons rent the heavens. The land shattered like a pot. The flood set out, its might came upon the peoples. One person did not see another, they were not recognizable in the destruction. The flood bellowed like a bull, like a whinnying wild ass the winds howled. The darkness was dense, there was no sun. There was nothing the likes of the flood.

The noise of the flood reached the gods. Enki was beside himself, seeing that his sons were thrown down before him. Nintu, the great lady, her lips were covered with feverishness. The Seven great Anunnaki were sitting in thirst and hunger. The goddess saw it as she wept, the midwife of the gods, the wise Mami.

Nintu: Let the day become dark, let it become gloom again in the assembly of the gods. How did I with them, command total destruction? Enlil has had enough of bringing about an evil command, like that Tiruru, he uttered abominable evil. As a result of my own choice and to my own hurt I have listened to their noise. My offspring – cut off from me – have become like flies!

As for me, like the occupant of a house of lamentation, my cry has died away. Shall I go up to heaven as if I were to live in a treasure house? Where has Anu the president gone, whose divine sons obeyed his command? He who did not consider but brought about a flood and consigned the peoples to destruction?

Narrator: Nintu was wailing.

Nintu: What? Have they given birth to the rolling sea? They have filled the river like dragon flies. Like raft they have put in to the edge, like a raft, they have put in to the bank. (sigh) I have seen and wept over them. I end my lamentation for them.

Narrator: She wept and eased her feelings; Nintu wailed and spent her emotion. The gods wept with her for the land, she was surfeited with grief and thirsted for beer. Where she sat, the gods sat weeping with her like sheep, they filled the trough. Their lips were feverishly thirsty, they were suffering cramps from hunger. For seven days and seven nights came the deluge, the storm, the flood. For seven days, the gods remained hungry without humans to provide meal offerings for them.

[broken]

Narrator: After the boat came to a stop on the land, Atrahasis prepared an offering. The gods smelled the fragrance and gathered like flies over the offering. The warrior Enlil spotted the boat and was furious with the IGIGI.

Enlil: We, the great Anunnaki, all of use, agreed together on an oath! No form of life should have escaped! How many did survive the catastrophe?

Anu (opening his mouth to address warrior Enlil): Who but Enki would do this?

Enki (opening his mouth the address the great gods): I did it in defiance of you! I made sure life was preserved! I am responsible for saving life.

Narrator: After discussing punishments for Nintu and Enki, and new methods for population control to control the noise of humans, the gods turn on Enlil and offer a song of praise to Enki.

All gods: We brought about the flood, but man survived the destruction. For your praise, let the IGIGI hear this song and extol your greatness to one another. I shall sing of the flood to all peoples. Listen.

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This English version produced by Ingrid E. Lilly  
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