

Volume 1

The First Exodus:

Leaving Ur of the Chaldeans

The Life and Times of the Chosen People
of God, in Short Story Form.

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Introduction:

The goal of this work is to capture historical details of ancient life during the time of the early Hebrew and Mesopotamian peoples, and to present them in a 'living' short story form. This is a work of historical fiction, but is influenced by some of the ancient historical narrative beliefs of Judaism. Extra-biblical resources have been used to add detail and plot, such as the Jewish *Midrash*, an ancient Jewish commentary on Scripture, and Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*. Excerpts of Chaldean writings have also been incorporated, but offered in contrast to the Holy Scriptures, to which they bear some remarkable similarities. In every case, however, it has been our objective to present Holy Scripture as superior. We make no claims as to the historical accuracy of either the *Midrash* or Josephus' great work, *Antiquities of the Jews*. But they provide credible detail and plot direction, as well as opportunity for spiritual edification that otherwise would be lacking in this volume.

I The Idol Shop

Note: This story is derived from ancient Jewish tradition found in the *Midrash*, outside of Holy Scripture.

And Joshua said unto all the people, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, 'Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods.'"

Genesis 24:2

And Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees. Genesis 11:28

It is very hot and and dry most of the year in Chaldea, but for a short period in winter, it is cool with a higher possibility of rain. It was one of these cool, rainy days when Mashda was told by his mother to go deliver a package to his great grandfather, Terah, at his idol shop in the city. Mashda dutifully obeyed and headed down the slippery clay road alongside the river bank of the great Euphrates towards Ur. The rainy season raised the river level only a very small amount. It was later in the spring when the snow melt high in the mountains of Anatolia would cause the rivers downstream to periodically flood. Mashda's family's home of tightly bound reeds had to be

rebuilt a number of times as a consequence of these floods. And during the springtime, they would pray fervently before the idols of their many gods for protection. But now the light, gentle rain was not something to be feared, but something to be enjoyed and was very pleasant to the senses. The fields were especially green and the air was sweet and fragrant. The insects sung and the birds excitedly fluttered about, chirping and adding to the chorus. Mashda only had to be careful not to lose his footing on the slippery mud of the road.

Fishermen continued to work along the banks of the river, casting their nets in the rain. And boats continued to transport goods, but covered with oiled cloth for protection. Mashda reached the high ramparts and walls of Ur and entered through the narrow, yet extraordinarily tall gates, into the city. From there he headed straight to his grandfather's shop in the merchant district not too far from the gates.

Terah was well-known and respected among the residents of Ur. He had been in business for decades and knew almost everyone of importance in the city. On this particular day, when Mashda entered Terah's shop through the front door, he was startled by the mess of broken idols strewn about, and his great-grandfather's raised voice in the back room: "What have you done to me! How could you publicly dishonor me like this! I left you

in charge of the store while I had to do an errand and what did you do! How do you think I felt when Gishkim, whom I have known for decades, came to me on the street very visibly distressed and loudly complaining in front of everyone about how you, my very own son, mistreated him and showed disrespect to the gods?! He told me how you asked his age and then shamed him by questioning how he could worship a day-old statue! And if that is not enough! I immediately heard from others about Gashan, a Lady of one of the most pious and renown families in Ur, who also came into the shop wanting to make an offering to the idols. And what did you do to her??? You took a stick and smashed all of the idols in front of her, except for *An*, the largest of them, and you put the stick in its hands. And now you have the gall to tell me that it was the idols themselves who made this mess in my shop when they argued about which should eat the offering first! With *An* destroying all the smaller ones so that it could have the offering completely to itself! Do you think I am a fool?! That I am so stupid?! Are you trying to destroy my reputation here? They are only statues and have no knowledge! You treat me, your elder and father, as an idiot!

Mashda then heard his great uncle's voice, Abram, calmly respond, "You deny their knowledge, yet you worship them."

Terah, at this point, was completely beside himself with rage and dragged Abram into the front of the store, not even noticing Mashda, and out the front door. As he left, he gruffly yelled, "That's it! I am taking you to Nimrod!"

Mashda felt compelled to follow, but kept a safe distance behind. When they reached the central court of the city next to the palace, Terah sent a messenger to bring King Nimrod. They were mutually acquainted and also being relatives, the king responded quickly to Terah's request. After hearing Terah's formal complaint, Nimrod turned to Abram and said, "We worship fire."

Abram responded, "Water puts out fire."

Nimrod said, "We worship water as well."

Abram responded, "The clouds hold water."

Nimrod declared even more emphatically, "And we worship clouds!"

And Abram returned, "The wind pushes the clouds."

Then Nimrod, clearly losing patience, said in a stern tone, "Well, we worship the wind too!"

And Abram again calmly responded, "People withstand the wind."

This was too much for Nimrod and in his anger, he demanded that Abram be cast into the fire. "If Abram is correct, if there truly is only one God and our gods are false, then his God will save him!" the soldiers quickly built a fire, grabbed

Abram, and pushed him into it. But he remained standing in the midst of it and did not burn. When Abram's brother, Haran, who had also quickly come to the court when he heard about the commotion between his father and brother, saw this, he was amazed and declared Abram's God to be true and the gods of the Chaldeans to be false. He also was thrown into the fire. But he was not saved by God and died as a martyr at the side of Abram, before Terah.

Terah was dumbfounded and grief-stricken by what had just happened and the loss of his son, Haran. He was angry at Abram, but he did not expect to lose his other son, Haran. Yet, this event caused his heart to soften and come to repentance. What he had witnessed of Abram's faith while standing before Nimrod deeply affected him for the rest of his life. He closed his shop and put away his idols at home. When Abram told him that he had received the word from God: "*Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land I will show thee,*" (Genesis 12:1), Terah realized he must follow Abram.

Mashda immediately ran home, falling a number of times in the slippery mud but not caring. He excitedly told his family what he had just witnessed. Though they deeply sorrowed for the loss of Haran, a close relation and great uncle, this event helped give them courage to leave the

THE FIRST EXODUS

secure life they had always known in Ur, to put away their own idols, to walk in faith on unfamiliar paths, and follow Abram towards an unknown future.



CHALDEAN KING WITH ATTENDANTS.

II The Astrologers

Note: This story is based on Josephus' account.

Abram's wife, Sarai, was barren and he had no son of his own. So, following the death of Haran, Abram adopted Lot, Haran's son, and offered him protection and rights to his inheritance.

It was not easy being the son of Abram in Ur, however. Abram was increasingly falling into conflict with the astrologers and other learned men over the worship of their many gods. And this conflict would affect everyone closely related to him as the Chaldeans became ever more offended and disturbed by Abram's zeal for his 'one true God' at the expense and rejection of their own.

The Sumers, also known as Sumerians, of Chaldea were the very first people in the world to form a civilization. And even at this time, after the formation of the Akkadian Empire, the very first empire in the world, and the merger of the Sumerian and Akkadian cultures, as well as the take-over by the Elamites from the east in what now is western Iran, the people of Chaldea were still the most advanced, though Egypt was also rapidly developing and not far behind.

The Sumers were the first to develop writing, in the form of cuneiform. They developed advanced mathematics, including trigonometry and calculus, in order to aid in the design of their immense irrigation and building projects as well as to calculate the orbits and motion of celestial bodies. And it is now believed that they understood and used a form of Pythagoras' Theory many centuries before Pythagoras in Greece 'discovered' it.

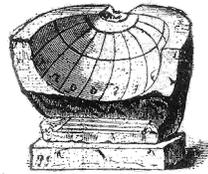
But in spite of their great technological advancement, the astrologers continued to believe that each heavenly body was ruled by a god, and that this god had complete control over it. And this is where Abram would argue against their logic and reasoning by asking them, "If these bodies had power to move themselves, according to their own whims, why then, do they not move unpredictably? How is it that we can predict where they will be as well as predict other visible phenomena on land and sea? Are they not under the control of one supreme Authority, who has created laws that guide all of creation, in the heavens, the earth and the depths of the sea? And are not the celestial bodies, the earth and the seas subservient to these predictable laws and to Him who commands all creation through them? Ought we not to offer the Lord of all things, honor and thanksgiving, for it is

THE ASTROLOGERS

He who has created the heaven and the earth and everything contained within it?"

The astrologers then angrily retorted and belittled Abram, knowing his greatest weakness, "Why, then, has your God given you no son of your own! Are you not cursed for having no children? Who are you to speak to us about God, when your God has failed to provide you with your own offspring to carry on your family lineage?"

The infuriated Chaldean astrologers and other learned men who had fallen into heated discourse with Abram made life in Ur increasingly difficult for those closely related to Abram. They too, found themselves accused and berated. But this did not in anyway, dampen Abram's zeal.



THE CHALDEAN SUNDIAL.
THE VERY FIRST TO BE INVENTED
IN THE WORLD.

III

The Final Confrontation

Note: This story is heavily based on the Jewish *Midrash*.

Abram would tie ropes around two idols, and drag them along the ground, calling throughout the narrow streets of Ur, “Who will buy an idol that can do nothing, either for itself or for the men who worship it? It has a mouth, but cannot speak. It has eyes, but cannot see. It has feet, but cannot walk. It has ears, but cannot hear!”

The people who heard Abram were amazed by his words and fearlessness. They knew Nimrod had proclaimed that anyone who followed the God of Abram, would be put to death.

As Abram went through the streets, he met an old woman who approached him, intending to buy one of the idols he dragged on the ground, in order to love and worship it. She requested for the larger one of the two.

Abram then said, “Old woman, old woman, I know of no profit, either with the big one or the little one, either for themselves, or for others. What has become of the big image you had purchased from my brother Haran to worship?”

She replied, “Thieves came in the night and stole it, while I was still at the bath.”

“If this is true,” Abram asked, “how can you worship an idol that cannot even save itself from thieves, let alone save others like yourself out of misfortune? You silly old woman! How is it possible for you to worship this image as a god? If it is a god, why did it not save itself out of the hands of those thieves? No, in the idol there is no profit, either for itself or for those who adore it.”

The old woman responded, “If what you say is true, whom, then, shall I serve?”

Abram replied, “Serve the God of all gods, the Lord of all lords, Who created the heavens and the earth, the sea and all therein—the God of Nimrod and the God of Terah, the God of the east, of the west, of the south, and of the north. Who is Nimrod, the dog who calls himself a god, that worship is offered unto him?”

Abram succeeded in opening the eyes of the old woman, and she became a zealous confessor of the one true God. When she found her stolen idol, instead of putting it back on the high place in her home, she shattered it into many pieces with a stone. And as she walked her way through the narrow streets of Ur, she too cried, “Who will save his soul from destruction, and be prosperous in all his doings, let him serve the God of Abram!”

Thus, she converted many men and women to true belief.

But the old woman had to pay for her zeal for her true faith with her life before Nimrod.

Nimrod became increasingly threatened by Abram and his growing success of converting the inhabitants of Ur to his God in spite of Nimrod's threat of death. After the first burning attempt, Nimrod attempted to imprison Abram a year without food or water. He then commanded that wood should be gathered from great distances around Ur and a huge furnace be built. The warden could not believe that Abram was still alive, for he had been left for dead and forgotten in the far reaches of the prison, but obeying the orders from Nimrod, he went to Abram's cell, calling his name, "Abram, are you alive?"

In his amazement, he heard Abram's voice, "I am living."

The warden then questioned, "Who has been bringing you food and water for all these many months?"

Abram replied, "Food and drink has been brought to me by Him, who is over all things, the God of all gods, and the Lord of all lords, who alone worketh wonders. He who is the God of Nimrod and the God of Terah and the God of the whole world. He provides food and drink to all beings. He sees, but He cannot be seen. He is in the heavens above, and He is everywhere present and filleth all things, here on earth. He is the

treasury of good things and the giver of all life.”

The warden then became convinced of the truth of the God of Abram and he proclaimed his belief publicly before Nimrod. He did not fear the King’s threat of death. When the King’s executioner raised his sword, and set it at the warden’s throat to kill him, the warden exclaimed, “He is the Eternal God, the God of the whole world as well as of the blasphemer Nimrod!” But the sword could not cut his throat. The harder the swordsmen tried, the more the sword broke to pieces.

Nimrod, however, was still determined to make Abraham die by fire. But as the executioners attempted to throw him into the roaring furnace, the flames leapt out and consumed them. Many more attempts were made to cast Abram in, but it was always those who were attempting to throw him in, who were overcome by the fire while he was preserved. Satan then suggested to Nimrod, after taking human form, to catapult Abram into the flames so that no one else needed to draw close. Satan then approached Abram and said, “If you want to deliver yourself from the fire of Nimrod, bow down before him and believe in him.” But Abraham rejected the tempter by saying, “May the Eternal God rebuke you, you vile, contemptible, accursed blasphemer!” And Satan departed from him.

Abram's mother then came to him, begging him to worship Nimrod and escape death. But Abram said to her, "O mother, water can extinguish Nimrod's fire, but the fire of God will never die. Water cannot quench it." When she heard these words, she said, "May the God whom you serve, rescue you from the fire of Nimrod!"

Abram was finally placed in the catapult, and he raised his eyes heavenward and prayed, "O Lord my God, You see what this sinner plans to do with me!" His faith in God was unshakable. Then the Archangel Gabriel approached him and asked, "Abram, shall I save you from the fire?" He replied, "God in whom I trust, the God of heaven and earth, will rescue me," and God, seeing the humble, submissive faith of Abram, commanded the fire, "Cool off and bring tranquility to my servant Abram."

No water was needed to put out the fire. The logs burst into buds, and all the different kinds of wood put forth fruit, each tree bearing its own kind. The furnace was transformed into a royal garden and the angels sat with Abram. When the king saw the miracle, he said: "Great witchcraft! You make it known that fire has no power over you, and at the same time you show yourself to the people, sitting in a pleasure garden." But the princes of Nimrod called out with one voice, "No, our lord, this is not witchcraft, it is the power of

the great God, the God of Abram, beside whom there is no other god, and we acknowledge that He is God, and Abram is His servant.” All the princes and all the people believed in the one true God, the Eternal God of Abram, and they all cried out, “The Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth below; there is no other god!”

The king, the princes, and all the people, who had been witnesses to these wonderful events came to Abram and prostrated themselves before him. But Abram said, “Do not bow down before me, but before God, the Master of the universe, Who, has created you. Serve Him and walk in His ways, for He it was who delivered me from the flames, and it is He who has created the soul and spirit of every human being. It is He who forms man in the womb of his mother, and brings him into the world. And it is He who saves from all sickness those who put their trust in Him.

The King then dismissed Abram, after giving him an abundance of precious gifts, including two royal slaves, silver, gold and gems. But the gifts did not bring joy to Abram as the three hundred followers that joined him and became followers of the One True God.

IV The Gift

Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

Genesis 12:1

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee on right paths. When thou goest, thy steps shall not be straightened; and when thou runnest, thou shalt not stumble.

Proverbs 4:11-12

† The noise and activity of the quickly assembled camp was dizzying. Boys chased loose sheep and goats as they tore through black-colored wool/goat hair woven tents, tipping over pots of water, with angry women yelling behind them. Camels stood calmly but frequently bellowing, and cattle restlessly mooing in their confined, hastily assembled paddocks, all adding to the noise, chaos and confusion. Men and women were organizing their supplies, getting them ready for the long journey in the morning, while young children were running about, largely unsupervised and getting into mischief.

Mashda slipped away to see his friend one last time in the city. He ran from the hustle of the camp, past green fields of swaying grain in the late afternoon sun, stately orchards of date palms and

carefully tended vegetable crops. He then came to the high, thick walls of the city and entered through the very impressive gate, guarded on each side by great winged lions, into the narrow streets of Ur. He passed numerous merchant shops, many with large displays of fine linen and wool and others with tables full of idols and other ceramics, located close to the gate. Next came the great Ziggurat, and the quieter neighborhood of scribes, teachers and priests associated with the temple. There he entered the spacious home of Namkuzu. It had thick clay brick walls, with small high windows. It was illuminated in the center patio by a two-story high open skylight. It was a pleasant shock to leave the bright, hot, dusty air of the street and enter into the dim, cool, almost cave-like home of Namkuzu. Mashda's family never lived in a structure like this and the difference from what he had known growing up, always amazed him. His own home was much smaller, a two-room dwelling made with tightly bound reeds just outside of the city walls. It was cooler than outside, but not like this, and Namkuzu's house had many rooms. Yet, Mashda did prefer the wide-open space and peacefulness outside of the busy city. And he loved caring for the family's flocks of sheep and goats and watching the reed boats travel up and down

the Euphrates and out of the harbor to the sea.¹

It was an unusual friendship. Mashda was a commoner and shepherd boy while Namkuzu was of the intellectual class. Namkuzu's father was a scribe and he was in school studying to be one as well. Mashda's father had regularly done business with Namkuzu's family, selling them dairy products and meat that they raised. Mashda and Namkuzu would often meet each other on hot afternoons, swimming in the Euphrates and it was during these times that they developed a very unlikely friendship.

"You are really leaving?" Namkuzu asked Mashda, incredulously.

"Early in the morning," replied Mashda. "I snuck away to see you one last time. I might get into trouble though. Everyone is pretty busy right now."

Namkuzu then responded, "Many have been leaving Ur lately, since the Elamites came and conquered us."

Mashda replied, "I think we are leaving for different reasons."

Namkuzu then quietly asked, so that no one else in his family could overhear and with some

¹ Ur was situated by the outlet of the Euphrates River on the coast of the Persian Gulf at this time. Over the millennia, accumulating sediment has pushed the Persian Gulf 150 miles to the east of Ur. But at the time of Abraham, it was an active seaport and major point of trade.

trepidation, “Is it true your great uncle, Abram, now rejects the gods?”

Mashda felt uncomfortable with this question, but he also felt obligated to answer, likewise, in a very quiet whisper, “Yes, my uncle has ordered us to put away all of our idols and not take them with us to Harran.” A flash of horror spread on Namkuzu’s face. “You know, the great feast for Nanna will be celebrated later this week at the temple. How can you leave without her blessing? Both Harran and Ur are under her care.” Mashda became even more uncomfortable. He loved his friend. He loved the many times spent swimming with him in the cool refreshing waters of the Euphrates and playing boyhood games. But both were growing up now, and each were heading in very different directions. He realized that he must go, and maybe he should not have even come. “Namkuzu, I just wanted to say goodbye and that I am going to miss our times together. But I must go because I will get into trouble.” Namkuzu got up and said, “Well then, I want to give you something to remember me by.” He left the room and then shortly after, returned with a small tablet that he had written on. “This is a portion of ‘The Lamentation of Ur’² that I copied

² *The Lament of Ur* was written around 2000 B.C. shortly after the fall of Ur to the Elamites. It follows a similar pattern as the *Book of Lamentations* in the *Old Testament* and in the *Book of Psalms*.

in school. I want you to have it, to remember me.”

Mashda looked at its almost perfectly executed cuneiform on a small hand-sized clay tablet. He was not a strong reader, however. He spent more time helping his father in the fields with the flocks than at school. He shyly asked, “what does it say?” Namkuzu then read:

“I transgress and know it not. I sin and know it not. I wander on wrong paths and know it not. The Lord, in the wrath of his heart has overwhelmed me with confusion...” He then followed, “I pray you always follow the right path.”

Mashda carefully looked at it and then at Namkuzu and thanked him for it. It was something that he could keep, to remember his old friend and his old home. “I will not be able to bring much with me, but I will keep this always. I will miss you.” “I will miss you too, friend,” responded Namkuzu. They embraced and then Mashda quickly departed.

He was worried about getting into trouble. It was at this time that his family needed him most. But it was hard leaving home and not saying goodbye. And in the end, he was very glad to have gone to see Namkuzu.

When he entered camp, his mother saw him. Immediately, she started berating him, yelling where he had been, and that his uncle needed him now. He then ran to Lot’s tent.

His uncle looked at him with relief. He said, "Today you will become a man. I want you to be here in an hour with the other men so that I can give you instructions for tomorrow. Now go, check your flocks and make sure your chores are done. Your father has been looking for you!"

Mashda then ran to where his family's flocks were contained and watered them. He grabbed some bundled reeds and willow that had been gathered earlier in the day from the river's marshes, and quickly fed the many animals. His father came up from behind, asking him where he had been.

"I am sorry father, I had to see Namkuzu one last time. I know it was wrong to leave you without asking first, especially now. But look at what he gave me!" Mashda then showed his father the cuneiform tablet. His father looked at it carefully, and with more experience reading cuneiform, was able to decipher the script.

"This is a very meaningful gift. But finish your chores and then go to your uncle. I cannot have you do this again! We have much work to do and I need you!"

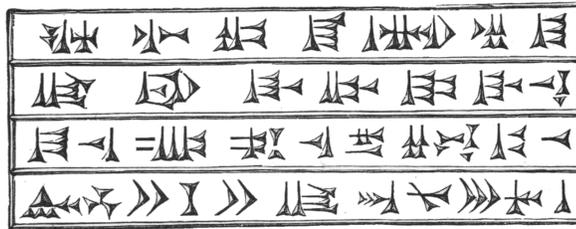
"Mashda replied with relief, "Yes father. Please forgive me. I will work very hard now." His father hugged him and then they both hurried to get the animals fed so that Mashda could go back to his uncle Lot's tent in time for the meeting.

When he got there, Lot chose several of the older young men, including an older brother of Mashda, to ride ahead very early in the morning on camels. They were to arrive to the next day's camp before the flocks, women and children. The caravan had to move the animals on the outer edge of the river valley, outside of the many crops planted along the Euphrates and its many irrigation canals. It was important that they moved quickly so that the large flocks didn't wander or damage any of the fields of grain. "We cannot allow the animals to feed much tomorrow during this first leg of the journey, so we must have reed and willow cut and prepared for them at tomorrow night's camp. I need you men to leave on camel early, to prepare their water and feed and the location for our camp. Mashda, you and the other shepherd boys must guide the animals carefully, keeping them out of any trouble. We cannot have angry farmers demanding retribution. I need you to be the one responsible for this." "Yes, uncle," replied Mashda. Lot then said, "We have a very long day tomorrow, so try to get some rest. May our journey be blessed."

Mashda ran back to his family's camp where his mother, who had just finished milking, was culturing some of the milk into yogurt. She was turning the rest into vinegar cheese to put in leather bags in preparation to be carried on one of

THE GIFT

the family's camels. "Mashda! Gather your things and get them ready for tomorrow. Then I need you to take some of this cheese and yogurt to the families of our relatives traveling with us." Mashda quickly responded, "Yes, mother," and then went to his sleeping area to gather all of his possessions, with the exception of his sleeping mat, and tied it in a tight bundle. Tomorrow he would wrap his mat around the bundle and tie it to one of the donkeys his family was bringing. He looked at his gift one last time and then carefully wrapped it and placed it safely in the center of his bundle. It was a bitter-sweet moment. He then prayed for God's blessing, and protection in this perilously long journey and for his friend he was leaving behind. He was both excited but also was scared. He knew his life was about to dramatically change forever.



CUNEIFORM TABLET

V The Covenant and The Story of the Great Flood

*And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it,
that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God
and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.*

Genesis 9:16

It was still very dark, with a heavy chill in the air, when activity resumed in the camp. Mashda awoke and quickly got up, rolled his sleeping mat around his precious bundle of possessions and began carrying it, along with the rest of the household goods, to the camels and donkeys outside. There he met his father and brothers and they packed each pack animal one-by-one. As the animals were being loaded, his mother and sisters, with the help of other women in the camp, quickly took down the tent and that too was packed. The caravan was on the move just as the eastern sky became streaked with color of the rising sun.

They headed towards the outer edge of the river valley, following a fringe of date palm groves. To the left of the road, towards the south, was an expansive desolate wasteland, as far as the eye could see, without any green or life visible anywhere. The animals wanted to turn right, to the

lush green fields of grain of the Mesopotamian river valley, and it was on this side that the boys had to constantly work. Mashda and the other shepherd boys with him, would stretch out their shepherds' staffs to guide the flocks forward, away from the right side of the road. It was a constant challenge to keep them moving in the right direction. As the day progressed, the heat increased, with the sun reflecting off the desert and intensely radiating on the left side of their bodies. It was a relief whenever they were able to pass through date palm groves, which provided at least a little shade and break from the blazing sun.

They arrived at their planned camp by early evening. They were not going to set up tents, but sleep under the stars. The women began collecting dried animal dung and plant debris to start fires for the evening meal while the men unloaded the animals. Women placed three wet lumps of river clay around some of the fires, since stones were difficult to find, and rested domed metal pans over them, with the dome facing upward.³ On this, they would heat the pan until water dropped on it sizzled and danced. After washing their hands, they would pour flour, that had previously been ground with a grinding stone and quern, into a bowl with a sprinkling of salt. A little water would slowly be

³ This is called a 'saj' in much of the Middle East today and is referred to in Leviticus 2:5.

poured into the flour, mixed and kneaded as a soft, elastic dough formed. With the fire hot under the pan, a fist-sized piece of dough would be pinched off and put on a piece of floured fabric. The ball of dough would be worked until completely floured, and then flattened and stretched, with the now circular piece of dough thrown from one hand to the other, similar to pizza dough today. But this dough would be stretched much thinner. Then it would be thrown over the hot pan (or saj). It would immediately hiss and bubble as it started cooking. And very quickly, it would need to be turned over. This bread would be eaten with lentil and yogurt stew and with cheese, dates and figs and was normally eaten both for breakfast and dinner..

On other fires was placed pots of lentils with herbs for the stews. Children gathered dates, mulberries and figs from nearby trees. The older boys took care of the animals, providing them with the pre-cut reeds and willow as well as fresh water. The older girls milked the animals. Everyone had much to do, in spite of being exhausted from the day's journey.

It wasn't until the evening meal that the travelers could begin to genuinely rest. The men gathered around the fires while the women

finished cleaning up and culturing the evening's milk. Mashda sat around the fire of his great uncle, the patriarch Abram, son of his great-grandfather, Terah. Abram, with his dark eyes sparkling from the light of the flickering fire, began to speak: "You have heard it said of old, of the great Gilgamesh who searched the world for the way to escape death. And how, on one of his many journeys he came across an old man, Utnapishtim, who told him a story from ages past, the story of how the gods brought a flood that swallowed the earth:

*Reed house, reed house! Wall, wall!
O man of Šuruppak, son of Ubar-Tutu
Tear down the house and build a boat!
Abandon wealth and seek living beings!
Spurn possessions and keep alive living beings!
Make the seed of all living beings go up into the boat.'*

The gods, led by Enlil, desired to remove humanity from the earth, but the god Ea warned Utnapishtim in a dream. Utnapishtim and his craftsmen built a large boat. He then loaded it with his family, the craftsmen, and 'the seed of all living creatures.' The waters of the abyss rose up, and it stormed for six days. Even the gods were frightened by the flood's fury. Upon seeing the complete destruction of mankind, the gods

repented and wept. The waters covered everything but the top of the mountain Nisur, where the boat landed. After seven more days, Utnapishtim released a dove, but it returned when it found nowhere else to land. He next released a sparrow, but it also returned, and then he released a raven, which did not return. Thus, he knew the waters had receded enough to leave the ark. Utnapishtim made a sacrifice to the gods. He and his wife were given immortality and lived at the end of the earth. The story of Gilgamesh goes on to say how the goddess Ishtar placed her necklace in the sky, as a reminder to the gods and a pledge to mankind that there would be no more floods.

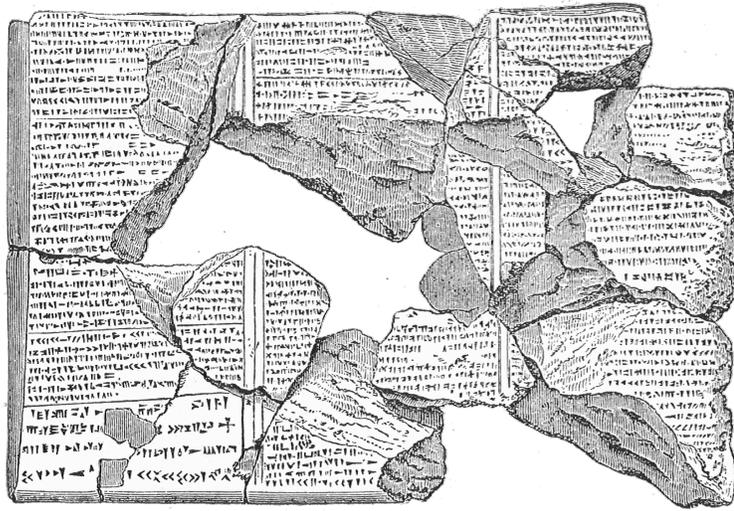
But now I will tell you this story according to the one true God, the God who created all of mankind, the heavens and the earth, the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life which we have also heard about in our ancient stories of Sumer:

God saw the wickedness of man and the evil imaginings of his heart. And the Lord regretted creating man. And the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, bird and creeping thing.' But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Noah was a just man and walked right with God. The Lord said to Noah, 'The earth is filled with violence because of man. I will destroy him from the face of the earth. Build an ark of wood

according to the instructions I give you. For I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all living things on the land. But with you, I will establish my covenant, you and your sons, and your wife, and your sons' wives. Bring into the ark two of every living animal, to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Bring seven pairs of every clean animal that can be used for sacrifice.' Noah did all that was commanded of him. And it came to pass that the waters of the flood came and all the fountains of the deep gushed up, and the windows of the heavens poured down. It rained forty days and forty nights. But God remembered Noah, and every living thing with him in the ark. God made the rain stop and wind pass over the earth so that the waters receded. After a hundred and fifty days, the ark came to rest upon the mountains of Ararat. Noah opened the window of the ark and sent forth a raven. It flew back and forth until the waters dried off from the earth. He sent forth a dove. But the dove found no rest and she returned to him. After seven more days, he sent out the dove again. It returned in the evening with an olive leaf in its beak. He waited seven more days and sent the dove a third time. This time it did not return. Noah and his family, and the animals with them, all left the ark. And Noah built an alter unto the Lord and took every clean beast and every clean fowl, and

offered burnt offerings on the altar. The Lord smelled the sweet offering and said in His heart, 'I will not again curse the ground for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. Nor will I again kill every living thing as I have done. While the earth remains, planting and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. And I will establish my covenant with you, that never again will all life be destroyed by a flood, nor shall a flood come again to destroy all the earth.' And God said, "This is the token of the covenant which I am making between you and Myself and every living creature that is with you, for all generations to come. I will set my rainbow in the clouds, and it shall be a reminder of my covenant."

Abram finished by saying: "We are a chosen people for a special covenant. As with the great *Epic of Gilgamesh*, we have left our homes and abandoned our wealth and possessions. Like Gilgamesh, we are on a journey to find everlasting life, but we are seeking that eternal life through knowing the One and Only, True God."



TABLET WITH MESOPOTAMIAN FLOOD ACCOUNT