**Sumerian Creation Myth**

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The earliest record of the [Sumerian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_mythology) creation myth, called The Eridu Genesis by [Thorkild Jacobsen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thorkild_Jacobsen), is found on a single fragmentary [tablet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Clay_tablet) excavated in [Nippur](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nippur). It is written in the [Sumerian language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_language) and dated to around 1600 BC. Other Sumerian creation myths from around this date are called the [Barton Cylinder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barton_Cylinder), the [Debate between sheep and grain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate_between_sheep_and_grain) and the [Debate between Winter and Summer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debate_between_Winter_and_Summer), also found at Nippur.

Summary

Where the tablet picks up, the gods [An](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_(mythology)), [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil), [Enki](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki) and [Ninhursanga](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninhursanga) create the [black-headed people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumer) and create comfortable conditions for the animals to live and procreate. Then kingship descends from heaven and the first cities are founded: [Eridu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eridu), [Bad-tibira](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad-tibira), [Larak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larak_(Sumer)), [Sippar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sippar), and [Shuruppak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuruppak).

After a [missing section](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lacuna_(manuscript)) in the tablet, we learn that the gods have decided not to save mankind from an impending flood. [Zi-ud-sura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziusudra), the king and *gudug* priest, learns of this. In the later [Akkadian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akkadian_language) version, [Ea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enki), or Enki in Sumerian, the god of the waters, warns the hero ([Atra-hasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-hasis) in this case) and gives him instructions for the ark. This is missing in the Sumerian fragment, but a mention of Enki taking counsel with himself suggests that this is Enki's role in the Sumerian version as well.

When the tablet resumes it is describing the flood. A terrible storm rocks the huge boat for seven days and seven nights, then [Utu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utu) (the Sun god) appears and Zi-ud-sura creates an opening in the boat, prostrates himself, and sacrifices oxen and sheep.

After another break the text resumes: the flood is apparently over, the animals disembark and Zi-ud-sura prostrates himself before [An](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_(mythology)) (sky-god) and [Enlil](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enlil) (chief of the gods), who give him eternal life and take him to dwell in [Dilmun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dilmun) for "preserving the animals and the seed of mankind". The remainder of the poem is lost.

Legacy

Two [flood myths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth) with many similarities to the Sumerian story are the [Utnapishtim](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utnapishtim) episode in the [Epic of Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh) and the [Genesis flood narrative](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genesis_flood_narrative) found in the [Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible). The ancient Greeks have two very similar myths: The [Deucalion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deucalion) and Zeus' flooding of the world in Book I of Ovid's Metamorphoses.

Ziusudra and Xisuthros

Zi-ud-sura is known to us from the following sources:

* From the Sumerian Flood myth discussed above.
* In reference to his immortality in some versions of *The Death of Gilgamesh*
* Again in reference to his immortality in *The Poem of Early Rulers*
* As [Xisuthros](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xisuthros) (Ξίσουθρος) in [Berossus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berossus)' [Hellenistic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hellenistic) account of the Babylonian history
* As [Ziusudra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ziusudra) in the WB-62 recension of the [Sumerian king list](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_king_list). This text diverges from all other extant king lists by listing the city of [Shuruppak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuruppak) as a king, and including Ziusudra as "Shuruppak's" successor.
* A later version of a document known as *The Instructions of Shuruppak* refers to Ziusudra.

In both of the late-dated king lists cited above, the name Zi-ud-sura was inserted immediately before a flood event included in all versions of the [Sumerian king list](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_king_list), apparently creating a connection between the ancient [Flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flood_myth) and a historic flood mentioned in the king list. However, no other king list mentions Zi-ud-sura.

**See also**

* [Atra-Hasis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atra-Hasis)
* [Creation myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_myth)
* [Deluge (mythology)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deluge_(mythology))
* [Enûma Eliš](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/En%C3%BBma_Eli%C5%A1)
* [Epic of Gilgamesh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epic_of_Gilgamesh)
* [Gilgamesh flood myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gilgamesh_flood_myth)
* [Mesopotamian mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamian_mythology)
* [Sumerian literature](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sumerian_literature)

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