

**Sin-leqqi-unninni, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablets 11 and 12**  
**Wesley Advocates** **19 March 2017**

*XI. i*

In what ways does Gilgamesh parallel himself to Utnapishtim? Why?

What does Utnapishtim relate to Gilgamesh that “no person has ever been told”?

Where did Utnapishtim live in Sumer? How do we know there were significant temples there?

Who sent the great flood? Why?

Who told Utnapishtim to build the ark? What else does he urge Utnapishtim to do?

How long did building the ark require? How did Utnapishtim provision the ark, and why? Who accompanied him? What, specifically, did he not include (see lines 28 and 33)?

*XI. ii*

How big was the ark? What were its dimensions? Describe the design.

Why did Utnapishtim keep sacrificing? How did he persuade laborers to keep working on the ark?

What god decided the time to set off? Why did the Anunnaki weep? Indeed, how do all the gods, except the one sending the flood, respond to what happens?

*XI. iii*

How long do the storms last? Then how does Utnapishtim know storm has ended? Where is he then? What does he see in the dawn? And how does he respond to what he sees?

How long does Utnapishtim wait before sending out the watch-bird? And what is the result?

Later he sends out a swallow—with what result?

And finally he sends a raven—with what result?

How does he seek to win the gods' favor again?

*XI. iv*

Why does the poet turn again to Aruru? What should we remember about her?

What do we observe in Figure 31?

Utnapishtim is glad to see Aruru and welcomes other goods, too—all but whom? What is his particular grievance against Enlil?

When Enlil spies the ark, why is he angry? Who are the Igigi? How does Ea chastise Enlil? What is the gods' particular grievance against Enlil? What should Enlil have done instead of sending this great flood?

How does this story differ from the Biblical one with regard to cause and effect?

Thus, after telling of the flood, Utnapishtim describes his apotheosis: why was it so ordained? And now where does Utnapishtim live?

If Gilgamesh is destined to become immortal, he must prove his worthiness in a trial of sleeplessness. For how long must he remain awake? Why is this test especially appropriate for one seeking immortality?

How does Mrs. Utnapishtim regard Gilgamesh? What does she want for him?

*XI. v*

How is Mrs. Utnapishtim paralleled to Shamhat and Siduri?

Why is Utnapishtim's epithet "one who rarely spoke"?

How long did Gilgamesh remain awake? When he fails the test, he asks (see lines 215 ff.) where he can possibly find a home when he has no life. What does he mean?

What does Utnapishtim ask of Urshanabi? Why does Gilgamesh need this help? What sections of the poem does this material remind us of?

Please note that, once he accepts some responsibility for Gilgamesh's well-being, Urshanabi will cease rowing the sea of death. What will he do instead?

## XI. vi

Sympathetic to the hero Gilgamesh, Mrs. Utnapishtim wishes to offer him yet another chance. As a result, Utnapishtim calls out to him with crucial information about a secret plant?

What do we see in Figure 32?

Where does Gilgamesh find the plant? What does he hope to do with it? What happens to the plant? How does Gilgamesh feel about this additional failure? Note the extreme language. How does this material parallel (even foreshadow) what happens in the Garden of Eden?

How quickly do Gilgamesh and Urshanabi traverse the distance from Dilmun to Uruk? Why so quickly?

What does Gilgamesh especially want Urshanabi to see and admire? Why?

## XII

How can we explain the lack of columns in Tablet 12?

What do we see in Figure 33? What does this illustration suggest about Gilgamesh and the rest of his life?

This tablet describes a journey to the underworld—such as we read in Vergil's *Aeneid* and Dante's *Inferno* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Joyce's *Ulysses*. How does this journey prefigure and parallel those we are more familiar with?

Who goes into the underworld? At whose behest? How far? Whom do we find there? In what conditions?

Who is Ereshkigal? What does she do? How does the poet characterize her?

Who precisely are “the dead who-do-not-live”? How does Enkidu offend the dead? Why does he do so despite warnings to the contrary?

In lines 50-59, what is Enkidu doing? Why such outrageous behavior?

Enkidu longs for Namtar to help him return to his former, earthly life, but he cannot. Why?

Nergal, too, refuses to help Enkidu. Why? Although Enkidu has longed for a soldier's death in battle, what happens here?

From Gilgamesh's point of view, Enkidu died in his place. What help does he want from Enlil? What does Enlil do? Why are we unsurprised?

Whom else does Gilgamesh seek help from? With what results?

What does Nergal do—and does that ultimately help Enkidu?

Gilgamesh begs Enkidu, "Tell me of death and where you are." How is this plea consistent with what we know of both heroes heretofore?

What does Enkidu reveal about death? Whom does he describe amongst the dead? Will any of that information comfort Gilgamesh? Or comfort us? Note the use of stichomythia and distichomythia in lines 111-145. How does this poetic device especially suit the conversation here?

Why the abrupt ending?

How well do you think Tablet 12 suits those coming before? Would you have chosen a different Gilgamesh story to end the epic? Which? Why?