

# The Epic of Gilgamesh

retold by Anita Feagles



**ABOUT THE READING** *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is a collection of stories about a Sumerian king who lived in Babylonia on the River Euphrates in modern Iraq around 2500 BC. The people of Mesopotamia called this epic *He Who Saw Everything*. The oldest written copy of the tale comes from twelve clay tablets that were written in cuneiform (around 900 BC). In the following excerpt, Gilgamesh has asked about the secret to everlasting life.



As you read the passage below, think about how this tale resembles another familiar story.

Utnapishtim said, "I will tell you the secret."

In the old days, the world became full of people, and the noise became so great that it bothered the gods. They had a meeting and said, "It is so noisy we cannot sleep!" So they decided to cause a flood. But Shamash, one of the gods, warned me. He said, "Tear down your house and build a boat. This will save your life. Make the boat as long as it is wide, and put a roof on it, and take the living creatures into the boat."

When I understood, I said to the god, "I will do what you command. But how shall I explain to people what I am doing?"

The god answered, "Tell them that the gods are angry with you, and that you must move away."

So early the next morning, I gathered my family together and we started building the boat according to his instructions, with seven decks. I gathered in supplies, oil and meat and wine. After seven days we

Utnapishtim is the only man to whom the gods have given everlasting life.

Shamash is the sun god.

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