

# EPIC OF GILGAMESH TABLET XII

This tablet may have been added to the other eleven tablets. However, it adds insight and provide background to the magical power of music in the Bible.

Descent to the Underworld The **Afterlife**

"If only I'd have protected our **instruments** in the safe home of the **drum-maker**;  
If only I'd have given so precious a **harp** to the craftsman's wife, she who **shepherds** such jewel-like children.

God, has your heart forgotten me?  
Who shall **descend** to Hell and **redeem** the **drum** from where it rests unused?

Who shall risk his life to retrieve  
the precious **gifts of Ishtar** from death?"

10. And for this quest his friend alone did pledge.  
So Gilgamesh said this to Enkidu:

"Descend, **descend to Hell** where life **does end**  
but listen now to words you need to know.  
Go slow to where death rules, my brother dear,  
and then arise again above and over fear."  
And, once more, Gilgamesh said this to Enkidu:

"Let all who would be saved today, take heed,  
and listen to god's words in time of need.  
When walking with the strong or with the dead,

20. do not **wear clothes of purple or of red**.  
Shun make-up that presents a holy face  
for they attack the **phony** and the **base**.

Leave here with me your **knife** and **rock** and **club**;  
such **weapons** only add to their own **strife**.

Put down your **bow**, as you would leave a wife.  
The souls of death will soil your hands and feet.

Go **naked, filthy, tearful**, when you meet.  
Be quiet, mild, remote, and distant too  
as those who will surround and follow you.

30. Greet no girl with kiss so kind upon her lips;  
push none away from you with fingertips.

Hold no child's hand as you **descend to Hell**  
and strike no boy who chooses there to dwell.

Around you, Enkidu, the **lament of the dead**  
will **whirl** and **scream**,  
for she alone, in that good place, is at home who,  
having given birth to beauty,  
has watched that beauty die.  
No graceful robe any longer graces her naked self

40. and her kind breasts, once warm with milk,  
have turned into bowls of cold stone."

But Enkidu refused to heed his friend  
as he set out that day to then descend  
to where the dead who-do-not-live do stay.

He wore **bright clothes** of celebrative red,  
the sight of which offended all the dead.  
His **colored face** made him seem fair and good  
but spirits hate the flesh that would dare  
remind us of the beauty they have lost.

50. He brought with him his **club** and **rock** and **knife**  
and did **cause strife** with those whom he did **mock**.

There, too, is where he showed off;  
where he went clothed among the naked,  
where he wasted food beside the starving,  
where he danced beside the grief-stricken.

He kissed a happy girl.  
He struck a good woman.  
He enjoyed his fatherhood.  
He fought with his son.

60. Around him, the lament for the dead arose;  
for she alone, in that sad place, is at home who,  
having given birth to beauty,  
has watched that beauty die.

No graceful robe any longer graces her naked self  
and her kind breasts, once warm with milk,  
have turned into bowls of cold stone.

She never even dreamed **once** of letting him return  
to life. **Namtar**, the decision-maker,  
would not help Enkidu. Nor would illness

70. help. **Hell** became his home.  
**Nergal**, chief-enforcer, would not help.

Dirges and laments rose all around.  
 Not even the soldier's death-in-battle,  
 with all its false and phony honor,  
 helped Enkidu. Death just swallowed him, unrecognized.

So the great son of **Ninsun**, proud Gilgamesh,  
 cried for his beloved friend  
 and went to the temple of **Enlil**,  
 the savage god of soldiers,

80. to say: "My god, when death  
 called for me, my best friend went  
 in my place and he is now no longer living."  
 But the savage god of soldiers, Enlil, was mute.

So Gilgamesh turned next to one who flies alone,  
 and to the **moon** he said: "My god, when death  
 called for me, my best friend went  
 in my place and he is now no longer living."

But the moon, who flies alone, was also mute;  
 so he went next to **Ea**, whose waters fill

90. the desert oasis even when no rain falls.  
 "My god," he cried, "when death  
 called for me, my best friend went  
 in my place and he is now no longer living."

And **Ea**, whose waters keep us alive as we journey over desert sands,  
 said this to **Nergal**, great soldier in arms.  
 "Go now, mighty follower; **free Enkidu** to speak once to kin  
 and show this Gilgamesh how to descend **halfway**  
 to Hell through the bowels of earth."  
 And Nergal, accustomed to absurd orders,

100. obeyed as soldiers do.  
 He freed Enkidu to speak once to kin  
 and showed Gilgamesh how to descend halfway  
 to Hell through the bowels of earth.

**Enkidu's shadow** rose slowly toward the living  
 and the brothers, tearful and weak,  
 tried to hug, tried to speak,  
 tried and failed to do anything but sob.

"Speak to me please, dear brother,"  
 whispered Gilgamesh.

110. "Tell me of death and where you are."  
"Not willingly do I speak of death,"  
said Enkidu in slow reply.

"But if you wish to sit for a brief  
time, I will describe where I do stay."  
"Yes," his brother said in early grief.  
"All my skin and all my bones are dead now.  
All my skin and all my bones are now dead.  
"Oh no," cried Gilgamesh without relief.  
"Oh no," sobbed one enclosed by grief.

120. "Did you see there a man who never fathered any child?"

"I saw there a no-man who died."

"Did you see there a man whose one son died?"

"I saw him sobbing all alone in open fields."

"Did you see there a man with two grown sons?"

"I did indeed and he smiles all day long."

"Did you see there a man with three of his own boys?"

"I did, I did; and his heart's full of joys."

"Did you there see a king with four full kids?"

"I did see one whose pleasure is supreme."

130. "Did you see there anyone with five children?"

"oh yes, they go about with laughs and shouts."

"And could you find a man with six or seven boys?"

"You could and they are treated as the gods."

"Have you seen one who died too soon?"

"Oh yes; that one sips water fair and rests each night upon a couch."

"Have you seen one who died in War?"

"Oh yes; his aged father weeps and his young widow visits graves."

"Have you seen one buried poor, with other homeless nomads?"

140. "Oh yes; that one knows rest that is not sure, far from the proper place."

"Have you seen a brother crying among relatives  
who chose to ignore his prayers?"

**"Oh yes; he brings bread to the hungry from the dumps  
of those who feed their dogs  
with food they keep from people  
and he eats trash that no other man would want."**