

An Act of the Gods

(A Story of Ancient Mesopotamia)

Akbar viewed the rubble that once had been his store. As the smoke from the charred ruins of this end of the city mingled listlessly with the steel-gray sky, he wondered where he had gone wrong. He had done everything according to plan. He had the priest advise him as to the exact type of chicken to kill. He had the most reliable fortuneteller read the bird's liver on the sacrificial pedestal at his local shrine for the gods.

Furthermore, he was assured that if he gave the gods 10 bushels of grain, 10 bushels of fruit, and several baskets of bread, his new store would have an excellent chance at making money. It was not an act of faith as much as it was the price of doing business. He could not afford to offend the gods. Before one mud brick of his store was put in place, he had painstakingly sought their blessings. It was how his father and his father's friends had begun all of their new business ventures. It was the way—priest, fortuneteller, gifts for the gods. Somehow, it had always seemed to work for them.

Yet a tremendous trembling of the ground had occurred during the night. Many people had been killed on this northern fringe of the city of Kish. Akbar's store was just inside the area of heaviest damage. Many buildings had collapsed, and numerous fires had started.

It finally dawned on Akbar that perhaps someone else was to blame. Perhaps another had offended the gods with a feeble sacrifice of stale bread and over-ripe fruit.

Unfortunately, Akbar and others had ended up paying for this foolish one's error in failing to render proper homage to the gods. He wondered aloud, "When will people learn that the gods must be paid off properly?"

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Answer the following questions:

1. Do you think Akbar was religious? If so, what did he worship?
2. In what kinds of "worship" activities was Akbar involved? Who was there to assist him?
3. Think of the kinds of worship activities that you may do as a part of your religion. How was Akbar's religion similar to or different from yours?
4. From what you read in this story, do you think Akbar's religion was concerned with any idea of an afterlife? Why or why not?