

## Isis: “Great of Magic”

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In ancient Egyptian myth, Isis was said to be the daughter of the earth god Geb and the sky goddess Nut. She was the wife of the god Osiris and mother to the god Horus. Revered for resurrecting her husband after his murder and protecting her infant son from dangerous gods, Isis was often called “Great of Magic.” She was worshipped throughout Egyptian history for her role as a mother and her powers of protection, healing, resurrection, and trickery.

Isis was an archetypal mother goddess. Egyptian myth tells of her trials and tribulations during her pregnancy as she attempted to protect her unborn son. Using her own magic and that of her fellow gods, she succeeded in safeguarding Horus’s birth and protected him during his turbulent childhood.

Ancient Egyptians commonly prayed to Isis for the protection of their children. Statues like the one found in the Art Museum of the University of Memphis<sup>1</sup> often show the child Horus on her lap or nursing from her breast. Isis feeding Horus was a powerful symbol of motherly affection and protection.

Horus faced a number of threats to his strength and vigor during his childhood. From scorpions to malevolent gods, Isis was there to heal and restore him to good health when he was attacked. She was worshipped by the Egyptians for this role as a healer. They appealed to her for protection over their own health and that of their children. She was even called on by doctors as they examined their patients and practiced healing arts.

Isis grieved terribly after her husband's death and tirelessly worked with her sister, Nephthys, to recover his body and restore him in death. Due to this, she became a favored goddess of widows and those who had experienced loss. Egyptian women, particularly, turned to Isis in times of mourning because they believed the goddess could truly understand their battle with loss.

Due to her ability to resurrect her husband Osiris and help him become the king of the dead, Isis was lauded for her powers over death. She was often depicted on coffins and in tombs, ushering the deceased to rebirth. As a goddess who could bring life, she was even prayed to by Egyptian women who sought her protection during liminal periods of pregnancy and childbirth.

Isis was also regarded as a resourceful trickster. In one myth, she fooled the sun god Re into telling her his true name. Knowing a person's true name in ancient Egypt was believed to give you power over them. To learn the name of the sun god, then, was quite the feat. This was the day Isis surpassed Ra in wisdom and power.

Isis was regarded as a clever and powerful goddess. The myths of her experiences resonated with the ancient Egyptians, and they saw themselves in her divine experiences. They called on her great magic to protect their health, their children, and their journey to the afterlife.

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<sup>1</sup> Art Museum of the University of Memphis, “Isis and Horus Figure,” <https://amum.catalogaccess.com/objects/1363>

### Further Reading!

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