

Flood Stories from Around the World

Europe

Roman:

Jupiter, angered at the evil ways of humanity, resolved to destroy it. He was about to set the earth to burning, but considered that that might set heaven itself afire, so he decided to flood the earth instead. With Neptune's help, he caused storm and earthquake to flood everything but the summit of Parnassus, where Deucalion and his wife Pyrrha came by boat and found refuge. Recognizing their piety, Jupiter let them live and withdrew the flood. Deucalion and Pyrrha, at the advice of an oracle, repopulated the world by throwing "your mother's bones" (stones) behind them; each stone became a person. [Ovid, book 1]

Scandinavian:

Oden, Vili, and Ve fought and slew the great ice giant Ymir, and icy water from his wounds drowned most of the Rime Giants. The giant Bergelmir escaped, with his wife and children, on a boat. Ymir's body became the world we live on. [Sturluson, p. 35]

Welsh:

The lake of Llion burst, flooding all lands. Dwyfan and Dwyfach escaped in a mastless ship with pairs of every sort of living creature. They landed in Prydain (Britain) and repopulated the world. [Gaster, pp. 92-93]

Lithuanian:

From his heavenly window, the supreme god Pramzimas saw nothing but war and injustice among mankind. He sent two giants, Wandu and Wejas (water and wind), to destroy earth. After twenty days and nights, little was left. Pramzimas looked to see the progress. He happened to be eating nuts at the time, and he threw down the shells. One happened to land on the peak of the tallest mountain, where some people and animals had sought refuge. Everybody climbed in and survived the flood floating in the nutshell. God's wrath abated, he ordered the wind and water to abate. The people dispersed, except for one elderly couple who stayed where they landed. To comfort them, God sent the rainbow and advised them to jump over the bones of the earth nine times. They did so, and up sprang nine other couples, from which the nine Lithuanian tribes descended. [Gaster, p. 93]

German:

A louse and a flea were brewing beer in an eggshell. The louse fell in and burnt herself. This made the flea weep, which made the door creak, which made the broom sweep, which made the cart run, which made the ash-heap burn, which made the tree shake itself, which made the girl break her water-pitcher, which made the spring begin to flow. And in the spring's water everything was drowned. [Grimm 30]

Near East

Egypt:

People have become rebellious. Atum said he will destroy all he made and return the earth to the Primordial Water which was its original state. Atum will remain, in the form of a serpent, with Osiris.

Assyrian:

The gods, led by Enlil, agreed to cleanse the earth of an overpopulated humanity, but Utnapishtim was warned by the god Ea in a dream. He and some craftsmen built a large boat (one acre in area, seven decks) in a week. He then loaded it with his family, the craftsmen, and "the seed of all living creatures." The waters of the abyss rose up, and it stormed for six days. Even the gods were frightened by the flood's fury.

Upon seeing all the people killed, the gods repented and wept. The waters covered everything but the top of the mountain Nisur, where the boat landed. Seven days later, Utnapishtim released a dove, but it returned finding nowhere else to land. He next returned a sparrow, which also returned, and then a raven, which did not return. Thus, he knew the waters had receded enough for the people to emerge. Utnapishtim made a sacrifice to the gods. He and his wife were given immortality and lived at the end of the earth. [Sandars, chpt. 5]

Sumerian:

The gods had decided to destroy mankind. A god (probably Enki) warned the priest-king Ziusudra ("Long of Life") of the coming flood by speaking to a wall while Ziusudra listened at the side. He was instructed to build a great ship and carry beasts and birds upon it. Violent winds came, and a flood of rain covered the earth for seven days and nights. Then Ziusudra opened a window in the large boat, allowing sunlight to enter, and he prostrated himself before the sun-god Utu. After landing, he sacrificed a sheep and an ox and bowed before Anu and Enlil. For protecting the animals and the seed of mankind, he was granted eternal life and taken to the country of Dilmun, where the sun rises. [Hammerly-Dupuy, p. 56; Heidel, pp. 102-106]

Africa

Southwest Tanzania:

The rivers began flooding. God told two men to go into a ship, taking with them all sorts of seed and animals. The flood rose, covering the mountains. Later, to check whether the waters had dried up, the man sent out a dove, and it came back to the ship. He waited and sent out a hawk, which did not return because the waters had dried. The men then disembarked with the animals and seeds. [Gaster, pp. 120-121]

Far East

Hindu:

Manu, the first human, found a small fish in his wash-water. The fish begged protection from the larger fishes, in return for which it would save Manu. Manu kept the fish safe, transferring it to larger and larger reservoirs as it grew, and later the fish saved Manu from a deluge by warning him to build a boat and letting him tie the craft to the fish's horn. The fish led him to a mountain and told Manu to tie the ship's rope to a tree to prevent it from drifting. Manu, alone of all creatures, survived. He made offerings of clarified butter, sour milk, whey, and curds. From these, a woman arose, calling herself Manu's daughter. Whatever blessings he invoked through her were granted him. Through her, he generated this race. [Gaster, pp. 94-95; Kelsen, p. 128; Brinton, pp. 227-228]

Assam:

A flood once covered the whole world and drowned everyone except for one couple, who climbed up a tree on the highest peak of the Leng hill. In the morning, they discovered that they had been changed into a tiger and tigress. Seeing the sad state of the world, Pathian, the creator, sent a man and a woman from a cave on the hill. But as they emerged from the cave, they were terrified by the sight of the tigers. They prayed to the Creator for strength and killed the beasts. After that, they lived happily and repopulated the world. [Gaster, p. 97]

Australasia and the Pacific Islands

Valman (northern New Guinea):

The wife of a very good man saw a very big fish. She called her husband, but he couldn't see it until he hid behind a banana tree and peeked through its leaves. When he finally saw it, he was horribly afraid and forbade his family to catch and eat the fish. But other people caught the fish and, heedless of the man's warning, ate it. When the good man saw that, he hastily drove a pair of all kinds of animals into trees and climbed into a coconut tree with his family. As soon as the wicked men ate the fish, water violently burst from the ground and drowned everyone on it. As soon as the water reached the treetops, it sank rapidly, and the good man and his family came down and laid out new plantations. [Gaster, p. 105]

North and Central America

Norton Sound Eskimo:

In the first days, all the earth was flooded except for a very high mountain in the middle. A few animals escaped to this mountain, and a few people survived in a boat, subsisting on fish. The people landed on the mountain as the water subsided and followed the retreating water to the coast. The animals also descended. [Gaster, p. 120]

Blackfoot (Alberta and Montana):

The Sun, the Moon, and their two children "Old Man" and "Apistotoki God" began creating the world. They were given sand, stone, water, and the hide of a fisher with which to complete the creation. A flood came, and they could save only those four things. Later, they create an old man, a dog, a man, and a woman. After a second flood, only those four are left on earth, and they create the rest of the world. [von Franz, p. 163]

Choctaw (Mississippi):

A prophet was sent by the high god to warn of a coming flood, but nobody took notice. When the flood came, the prophet took to a raft. After several months, he saw a black bird. He signaled it, but it just cawed and flew away. Later, he sighted and signaled a bluish bird. The bird flapped, moaned dolorously, and guided the raft towards where the sun was breaking through. Next morning, he landed on an island with all kinds of animals. He cursed the black bird (a crow) and blessed the bluish one (a dove). [Gaster, p. 116]

Maya (southern Mexico and Guatemala):

The Puzob, an industrious dwarf people, were the first inhabitants of the earth. God destroyed them with a flood because of their carelessness in their observation of custom. They heard that a terrible storm was coming, so they put some stones in a pond and sat on them, but the dwarfs were all destroyed. Jesucristo sent down four angels to investigate what was happening on earth. They removed their clothes and bathed, whereupon they became doves. Some other angels were sent down; they were turned into buzzards when they ate the dead. [Horcasitas, p. 194]

Two floods had destroyed humanity. Three people escaped a third and final flood in a canoe. [Horcasitas, p. 191]

Nicaragua:

The world was once destroyed by a deluge. After its destruction, the gods created all things afresh. [Gaster, p. 121]

Panama:

One man, with his wife and children, escaped the flood in a canoe. Mankind are descended from them. [Gaster, p. 121]

South America

Inca (Peru):

The water rose above the highest mountain in the world. All created things perished, except for a man and woman who floated in a box. When the flood subsided, the floating box was driven by the wind to Tiahuanacu, about 200 miles from Cuzco. [Gaster, p. 127]

Araucania (coastal Chile):

Two great serpents made the sea rise to determine which of them had the more powerful magic. The flood came after a strong earthquake and volcanic eruption. The people took refuge on a mountain which floated close to the sun. Afterwards, whenever the Araucanians felt an earthquake, they would flee to the hills carrying bowls to protect their heads from the sun's heat. [Vitaliano, p. 173]