

Flood Myths

Myths about massive floods washing away parts of civilisation have been told in many different parts of the world for thousands of years. Man's natural fear of the sea may be the reason that these myths are so popular. There appear to be many similarities between the stories, is it possible were they based upon real events?

Turtle Island

Anishinaabe (Native American tribes based around the Great Lakes) tradition tells of a flooded Earth. The Creator had cleansed the world of feuding peoples in order to begin life anew. Some animals survived the flood, such as the loon, the muskrat and the turtle.

Nanabush (a supernatural being who has the power to create life in others) was also present. Nanabush asked the animals to swim deep beneath the water and collect soil that would be used to recreate the world. One by one the animals tried, but one by one they failed. The last animal that tried — the muskrat — was underwater for a long time, and when it resurfaced, the little animal had wet soil in its paws. The journey took the muskrat's life, but the creature did not die in vain. Nanabush took



the soil and put it on a willing turtle's back. One day, a pregnant Sky Woman fell through a hole under the roots of a tree in Sky World (a land in the heavens where supernatural beings existed) and descended to Earth. Gently guided down by birds that saw her falling through the sky, she was placed safely onto the turtle's back. Sky Woman was grateful to the animals for helping her. This place became known as Turtle Island, the centre of creation, and it became populated by Sky Woman's descendants.



Bergelmir

According to Norse mythology, when Odin, Vé, and Vili slew the ancient giant Ymir, so much blood gushed out of his wounds that the whole race of frost-giants drowned in it. Only Bergelmir escaped with his family by floating away on their dining table. Bergelmir and his wife thus survived the flood and became the progenitors of a new race of frost giants.

Dwyfan and Dwyfach



An Ancient British flood myth has survived as a Welsh folk tale. A great flood was caused by the wild thrashings of the monster Afanc, who dwelt in Llyn Llion. Sometimes described as taking the form of a crocodile, giant beaver or dwarf, it is also said to be a demonic creature. The afanc was said to attack and devour anyone who entered its waters.

All humans were drowned except for Dwyfan and his companion Dwyfach, who were able to escape using her mastless boat. They built an imposing ship called Nefyd Naf Neifion, on which they carried two of every living kind. From Dwyfan and Dwyfach all of the island of Prydain (Britain) was repopled.

Gilgamesh

The Sumerian hero Gilgamesh travelled the world in search of a way to cheat death. On one of his journeys, he came across an immortal old man, Utnapishtim, who told Gilgamesh a story from centuries past in which the gods brought a flood that swallowed the earth.



The story went as follows: the gods were angry at mankind so they sent a flood to destroy him. The god Ea, warned Utnapishtim and instructed him to build an enormous boat to save himself, his family, and "the seed of all living things." He does so, and the gods brought rain which caused the water to rise for many days. When the rains subsided, the boat landed on a mountain, and Utnapishtim set loose first a dove, then a swallow, and finally a raven, which found land. The god Ishtar, created the rainbow and placed it in the sky, as a reminder to the gods and a pledge to mankind that there would be no more floods.

Atlantis

The Ancient Greek philosopher Plato told the story of Atlantis around 360 B.C. The founders of Atlantis, he said, were half god and half human. They created a utopian civilization and became a great naval power. Their home was made up of concentric islands separated by wide moats and linked by a canal that penetrated to the centre. The lush islands contained gold, silver, and other precious metals and supported an abundance of rare, exotic wildlife. There was a great capital city on the central island. However, the people became greedy and petty. The gods became angry because the people had lost their way and turned to immoral pursuits. As punishment, he said, the gods sent "one terrible night of fire and earthquakes" that caused Atlantis to sink into the sea.

