



Deluge

The scriptural deluge is regarded by historians and critical exegetes as a legendary product. “The legend of a universal deluge is in itself a myth and cannot be anything else.” ⁽¹⁾ It is “most nakedly and unreservedly mythological.”

The tradition of a universal deluge is told by all ancient civilizations, and also by races that never reached the ability to express themselves in the written symbols of a language. It is found all over the world, on all continents, on the islands of the Pacific and Atlantic, everywhere. Usually it is explained as a local experience carried from race to race by word of mouth. The work of collating such material has repeatedly been done, and it would only fatigue the reader were I to repeat these stories as told in all parts of the world, even in places never visited by missionaries. ⁽²⁾

The rest of the collected traditions are also not identical in detail, and are sometimes very different in their setting from the Noah story, but all agree that the earth was covered to the mountain tops by the water of the deluge coming from above, and that only a few human beings escaped death in the flood. The stories are often accompanied by details about a simultaneous cleavage of the earth. ⁽³⁾

In pre-Columbian America the story of a universal flood was very persistent; the first world-age was called Atonatiuh, or the age that was brought to its end by a universal deluge. This is written and illustrated in the ancient codices of the Mexicans and was narrated to the Spaniards who came to the New Continent. ⁽⁴⁾ The natives of Australia, Polynesia, and Tasmania, discovered in the seventeenth century, related almost identical traditions. ⁽⁵⁾

Clay tablets with inscriptions concerning the early ages and the deluge were found in Mesopotamia. Their similarity to the biblical account, and to the story of the Chaldean priest Berosus ⁽⁶⁾ who lived in the Hellenistic age, caused a great sensation at the end of the last century and the beginning of the current one. On this sensational discovery was based the sensational pamphlet *Babel und Bibel* by Friedrich Delitsch (1902) who tried to show in it that the Hebrews had simply borrowed this story, along with many others, from the Babylonian store of legends.

But if here and there the story of the flood could be said to have been borrowed by the scriptural writer from the Babylonians, and by some natives from the missionaries, in other cases no such explanation could be offered. The indigenous character of the stories in many regions of the world makes the borrowing theory seem very fragile.

Geologists see vestiges of diluvial rains all over the world; folklorists hear the story of a universal flood wherever folklore is collected; historians read of a universal flood in American manuscripts, in Babylonian clay tablets and in the annals of practically all cultured peoples. But the climatologists make it very clear that even should the entire water content of the atmosphere pour down as rain, the resulting flood could not have covered even the lowland slopes, far less the peaks of the mountains, as all accounts insist that this deluge did.

References

1. A. Loisy, *Les mythes babyloniens et les premiers chapitres de la genese* (Paris, 1901).
2. R. Andree, *Die Flutsagen* (1891); Sir J.G. Frazer, *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* (London, 1918); M. Winternitz, *Die Flutsagen des Alterthums und des Natuervoelker*
3. E.g., the Malaya story in Andree, *Die Flutsagen*, p. 29. s
4. [Cf. the Vatican Codex, first published by Humboldt, and the accounts of Ixtlilxochitl and Veytia among others.]
5. [Cf. A. C. Caillot, *Mythes, legendes, et traditions des Polynesiens* (Paris, 1914); H. H. Howorth, *The Mammoth and the Flood* (London, 1887), pp. 455ff.]
6. Berosus' story of the Deluge is quoted in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* Bk. IX, ch. 12, and in Cyril's *Contra Julianum*, Bk. I.

