

Facts & Fancy About the Bible - 5

Regarding the Genesis flood, Voltaire asserted, “Augustine, in his City of God, No. 8, says, ...neither Greek nor Latin history knows anything about the great deluge. In fact, none had ever been known in Greece but those of Deucalion and Ogyges. They are regarded as universal in the fables collected by Ovid...Augustine, therefore, is not mistaken, in saying that history makes no mention of this event.”

The author’s observation here is an attempt to place the Genesis account of the flood into the category of “fables” or myth. Britannica states that Greek “Myths were viewed as embodying divine or timeless truths, whereas legends (or sagas) were quasi historical. Hence, famous events in epics, such as the Trojan War, were generally regarded as having really happened, and heroes and heroines were believed to have actually lived... Most Greek legends were embellished with folktales and fiction, but some certainly contain a historical substratum.”

J.F.Bierlein’s book, *Parallel Myths* summarizes more than a dozen of the many more existing “flood myths”, starting with “the Story of Noah”, followed by legends ranging from India to Hawaii to the Americas. He includes the Greek Deucalion which was cited by Voltaire. Some remarkable parallels with the Genesis account include with the destruction of mankind by the flood, the cause being man’s moral depravity, building of a large ship, and the resting of the ship on the side of a mountain - a rather remarkable confluence of features which suggests that both stories are based on a common event.

Then he mentions the “flood myth” of the Mandan people, natives in North Dakota, having similar parallels to those of the ancient Greek story, but also including a bird, another feature in the Genesis account. In each settlement these people maintained a monument they called “the big canoe”, in recollection of salvation from the flood.

In all the listed stories are various parallels with “the Story of Noah”, whether in the legends of the Incas, Cree or Hawaiians. But the greatest number of parallels with the Genesis account of the flood is contained in a group of tablets known as the Gilgamesh Epic, from ancient Mesopotamia.

Also found there, by British archaeologist H.W. Blundell, was the Weld-Blundell Prism. It is inscribed in Sumerian cuneiform and is called the Sumerian King List. The list begins with the antediluvian rulers and ends with the dynasty ruling in the 19th century BC. The Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology notes that -

“Although not technically a flood account, the flood appears in this account as an epochal event dividing and defining the Sumerian history related to these rulers. This usage of the flood assumes that the writer and his audience knew the details of the flood; otherwise the recorded events on either side of the flood would not have had the significance that is implied. As Kenneth Kitchen has noted, ‘the Sumerians and Babylonians of ca. 2000/1800 BC believed so firmly in the former historical occurrence of such a Flood that they inserted it into the Sumerian King List’.”

The Gilgamesh Epic is the most ancient non-biblical story of the flood which is reviewed in Bierlein’s *Parallel Myths*. While The Epic presents the flood story in terms of pagan beliefs, it contains a remarkable list of parallels with the Genesis account.