

Flood and Earthquake as Punishment of Gods in Antiquity

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Abstract

Disasters are unplanned events that are either natural, technical, or human-induced. They disrupt daily life in human communities and create physical, economic, and social losses for civilizations. Many ancient cultures perceived the disasters that befell them as warnings from the gods and thought that natural disasters were caused by the divinities. Despite the great differences between the worldviews of the ancient societies and the historical changes they underwent, all definitions of relation shared a fundamental structure and function and they were all personalized. This also applies to catastrophes that were justified by a god's purpose or design. Natural catastrophes have been referred to as "natural evils" in theology and philosophy, as opposed to "moral evils," since they do not involve human decision-making. Unlike the modern world, ancient people attributed all natural phenomena to gods and superhuman beings. Lacking science and technology, ancient societies believed that natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods were sent by angry gods as punishment. However, the further back in time the inquiry goes, the more descriptions of catastrophes like floods and earthquakes that have been incorporated into myths and religions are found. In light of ancient recorded sources, the study's objective is to highlight the concept that gods' anger caused natural calamities.

Keywords: Antiquity, Disaster, Earthquake, Flood, Gods' Judgment, Social Anthropology

1. INTRODUCTION

Disasters are natural, technological or human-induced events that cause physical, economic and social losses for societies and negatively affect human communities by pausing daily life activities. Disasters are mainly divided into two groups as those that occur naturally and those that occur as a result of human negligence. While earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, avalanches, droughts, etc. are included in the category of natural disasters; fires, explosions and major accidents are included in the category of disasters that occur as a result of human activity and negligence. The common feature of natural disasters that have negative effects on human life is that they occur suddenly. As a matter of fact, if necessary precautions are not taken, disasters that develop unexpectedly cause loss of life and property damage, and social losses (Mandacı, 2020).

A cultural factor may emerge when individuals respond similarly to the unknowable side of natural disasters. Additionally, persons from comparable backgrounds, regions, and cultures have demonstrated similarities in their disaster mitigation techniques and skills (Çevirme, 2020).

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Related historical and social writings have used religious, mythical, and traditional emotions and ideas to explain the causes of natural disasters and have created punitive or protective rituals, discourses, and prevention methods as a result.

As Patterson (2013) states recently, an increasing number of historians have shown a greater interest in the history of natural disasters. In the past, people believed that godly actions were retributions for human wrongdoing, the results of heavenly wrath and judgment. Discussing natural disasters in relation to issues like evil in the world, human suffering, free will, and theodicy of God has also drawn the attention of many philosophers.

It is believed that many ancient beliefs developed in response to diverse environmental phenomena, including catastrophes. According to this theory, calamities happen because the gods are furious and sent them to punish sinful humanity. A priesthood was established in order to determine what was required and to carry out the necessary ceremonies and sacrifices in order to appease the gods (O'Mathúna, 2018).

Life for humans on earth has always required a conflict with the natural world. Although man has learned to hunt, gather, domesticate animals, and develop the soil over millennia of evolution, nature has always been unpredictable. The frequency of earthquakes, forest fires, storms, floods, hurricanes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, plagues, and epidemics was sufficient to persuade man that he was not in control of his environment. Numerous instances of these disasters, some of which appeared to overwhelm ancient civilizations, are documented in history; they all eventually turned into myths and legends (Grandjean et al., 2008). These myths capture not just the disaster itself but also how people reacted to it, asking why it occurred. Disaster was likely to be an expression of divine will in ancient times, when civilizations were fundamentally based on faith in God or gods: it was the anger of the gods that unleashed some tremendous misery on man.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

Due to the scope of this article, a literature review was conducted as a research method. In the study, the most important civilizations of antiquity were discussed and the perspective of earthquakes and flood disasters as the common view of ancient societies, where cultural transmission was the most intense, was discussed within the scope of written texts. In this study, which aims to be evaluated in the context of their common features within the scope of their own cultural understanding, original sources were primarily utilized. As the main sources, literary works, scientific studies, ritual texts and religious sources written in the period under investigation were taken as basis. In addition, current studies on the subject have also been referenced to support the research.

3. NATURAL DISASTERS AND MYTH RELATION

In order to understand the place of natural disasters in the context of belief in ancient times, it is necessary to examine the mythological stories that reflect the way people at that time made sense of the world they lived in. The development of myths and ideologies has been inspired by significant impacts on mankind. Exploring the "unknown" has introduced poetical prose, valiant work, mystical knowledge, and allegorical tales, such that the "myth" created by the human race

echoes something related to ethics, a significant event, deities, or imaginary concepts (Liritzis et al., 2019).

Each culture from the beginning has had a mythological system, and even though they live in very different geographies, the mythological perceptions of human societies accept remarkable similarities with each other¹. Although they take on diverse forms in many cultures and in different periods, myths are in fact the product of the common culture of humanity. The most important feature that distinguishes myths from other narratives is their sacred aspect. Undoubtedly, myths have become divine traditions. And these narratives are accepted as sacred texts by the masses who believe in them. Myths, being part of the "sacred" and sacred narratives, also cross paths with eschatology. Natural disasters, which are seen as the gods' way of punishing and causing the destruction of humanity, are also somewhat connected to eschatology. As Altun and Çınaroğlu (2020) point out that the doctrine of the ultimate things is known as *eschatology*, or more accurately, the events by which our known world comes to an end. It is the philosophy of the end of this world and its destruction. In this regard, it falls somewhere between theology and mythology. Eschatology and those with eschatological expectations anticipate the turning of time in God's favor and God's taking control of time.

Countless important old cultural centers have undoubtedly been destroyed by earthquakes, tsunamis, and typhoons. Therefore, the cataclysmic disaster of myths represents a local geological or climatic occurrence with significant effects on the wider area in question. In light of this, the mythology that is ingrained in the larger environmental reality stops serving the imaginative as its exclusive purpose. When biological, environmental, political, technical, geographical, and cultural aspects were violently shaken, these events might cause changes in, or possibly the almost total annihilation of human societies and natural ecosystems.

4. ACTS OF GODS

If the notion of disaster is compared to the concept of miraculous, it may be acquired a vital and fundamental insight into the understanding of disaster from the perspective of the ancient civilizations. As Dietrich (2015) states, the ancients did not view miracles as occurrences that defy natural laws, in contrast to the current understanding of miraculous, which sees a miracle as a break of natural laws. Ancient Israel believed that miracles were wonderful and terrifying acts and manifestations of God. Incredible stuff Fear is a part of the disaster phenomena in the same way that marvels are a part of miracles. Disaster and miracle share a lot in common because in ancient times, disasters were mostly caused by the activities of gods.

In the ancient Mesopotamian belief system, a sign that was considered negative was interpreted as the anger of the gods against humans and the occurrence of bad events by the gods. In line with this belief, the movements of celestial bodies and weather events such as storms, fog and thunder were constantly observed. Astrologers working under the palace in the Assyrian State sent reports to the king from various parts of the country and made recommendations (Mandacı, 2020).

¹ *Understanding the boundaries of various human mental functions and recognizing the differences between allegory, metaphor, and imagination and reason, folktale, and legend, fiction, fantasy, and fallacy, dream, scientific hypothesis, and the truth are key tasks in studying ancient myths. Ancient myths contain a vast accumulation of knowledge about human nature that has been gathered over centuries of observation. Myths are narratives in which the fundamental structure is real but the surface structure is false because events did not take place exactly as described (Laoupi, 2006).*

The Bible lists numerous catastrophes. These occurrences are said to have been sent by God as retribution for human sin. Given their stated nature, it is vital to discuss how and why the Judeo-Christian God may be justified in utilizing such methods to punish sinful behavior in humans. The Book of Jonah tells the tale of Nineveh, whose inhabitants responded to God's warnings, altered their behavior, and the disaster was avoided. According to several stories, calamities came as a result of specific deeds and happened after many warnings were disregarded. The Old Testament (URL 1) makes it clear that God will punish those who disobey his laws and reward those who do (Deuteronomy 11:26–28). It's crucial to consider the theological setting of such claims. These blessings and penalties were stipulated in a Covenant that ancient Israel voluntarily entered during a time when God's rule included both a geophysical and spiritual realm (Deuteronomy 5:27). God continually warned the Israelites through the prophets, despite the fact that when they didn't uphold their end of the bargain, he sent disaster on them. It's important to remember that these stories don't represent how God always interacts with individuals (O'Mathúna, 2018). God punished his people for their sins in the book of Joel by sending locusts, wildfire, starvation, earthquakes, trembling skies, and a lowering of the sun and moon (Joel 1:1- 2:11).

The ancient Near East and biblical writings both use the pattern—which suggests a strong correlation between human activities and their results—to explain how natural, political, social, and historical events are responses from God to human deeds. Thus, natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and social disorders such as military defeat, the obliteration of towns or political institutions, uprisings, and exile are justified as divine retribution for human evil (Berlejung, 2015). The Bible asserts that as the Creator of the universe, God is entitled to defend morality and punish evil. As predicted by several Old Testament prophets, He sometimes does this utilizing natural disasters. God has control over humanity, just as human authorities are responsible with upholding the rules that govern their realms. The discussion over God's existence and his nature, which is too extensive to review here, is whether or not to accept this (O'Mathúna, 2018). The harmonious ties that existed between God and humanity, among humans, and between humans and the environment were shattered by human sin. This calls for a reaction.

Ancient Near Eastern civilizations, as well as ancient Greek civilization and the Roman Empire, considered natural disasters as warnings sent by the gods to judge and punish people. Herodotus, who is frequently referred to as "the Father of History," claimed that the first tsunami to be observed occurred in 479 BC and was sent by the sea god Poseidon as retaliation for the Persians' siege of Potidaea. "Such justifications were more or less the standard for most of antiquity" (Molesky, 2015).

4.1. Flood

The Flood myth, which has origins in Mesopotamia, Greece, and the Bible, describes the various stages of an extraordinarily destructive natural calamity and people's responses to it. Disasters, as previously indicated, are a result of human sin, and God is judging us for it. One must acknowledge that the most prevalent explanation of natural disasters in the Bible is that God is punishing or retaliating for the moral, religious, and social transgressions of humanity. God saw the planet as corrupt and violent at this time (Lee, 2011). God observed how corrupted the planet had grown as a result of all its inhabitants' distorted lifestyles. Thus, God told Noah: "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth" (Gen 6:11-13). According to Genesis 6:1–13, the deluge was caused by the violence and socio-moral degeneration of all mankind. God works with and through the flood as an agent. The agent is catastrophic in this instance.

Other big myths also contain the flood story, which may ultimately serve to remember a single major catastrophe in the Middle East. The Flood narrative is connected to the Mesopotamian creation myth. This narrative can be found in a manuscript from the 17th century BCE that was written in cuneiform or an early wedge-shaped script. The narrative has two halves. The first explains the state of the world prior to the advent of man, while the second discusses the exponential rise in the number of people, the subsequent Flood, and the eventual return of the balance between the gods and humans (Grandjean et al., 2008).

Enlil's² fury culminates in the Flood, and the destruction it brings about is a reflection of how fierce it was. One could describe the Flood as the gods' weapon of mass destruction; it is only released during a crisis meeting of the gods where agreement is reached on its application. When the Great Flood occurs, the sky fills with clouds, winds howl, and thunder rumbles. The thunder deity Adad's voice can be heard in the clouds. What a paradox it appears that the sound that caused the calamity also defines it. The myth creators likened the dull roar of divine rage to a bull's bellowing. The aftermath of the Flood and the emergence of unavoidable occurrences like human mortality are further explained in the Mesopotamian myth. One guy and his wife survive the cataclysm in the story, which clearly has Biblical and Greek allusions. This man builds an ark after Enki/Ea, the god of creativity, forewarns him in a dream of the divine choice and the impending judgment. When the floodwaters recede, he offers a sacrifice to the gods, who gather around him and remember that humans were made to feed the gods because they were starving. The gods are initially appeased before becoming angry when they learn that a human has survived. Enki/Ea steps forward to defend himself when they inquire who among them has broken the secrecy oath that the council of gods had made them take. The gods come to the conclusion that humanity is necessary for their own survival, although noise reduction measures still need to be taken. The gods decide to shorten human life and decree the occurrence of things like infertility in women and child death in order to keep humans from ever becoming extinct but still from ever growing too numerous (Grandjean et al., 2008).

In mythology about floods and other ancient disasters, divine punishment is the most common theory³. According to the Greek Flood myth, Zeus decides to spit mankind out because of their misbehaviors. Ovid explains why the earth is soon to be submerged in the waves in the first book of the *Metamorphoses* (URL 2, vv. 160ff): "But that race too was contemptuous of the gods, bloodthirsty and violent: They were clearly sons of blood." When Zeus finally visits the earth, he discovers that his most horrible dreads have been grasped in *Metamorphoses* (I, vv. 212–15).

In the Flood myths, there is always a moral justification for divine anger. Because of their repugnant behavior and resistance to change, mankind has earned their fate. To prevent repeated catastrophes, a number of rites and sacrifices are necessary as part of the repentance and expiation process. However, in other situations and in other cultures, a misfortune could seem ethically wrong and motivated by malice.

² Enlil was one of the most important gods in the Mesopotamian pantheon. He was the god who set the course of events, whose orders could not be changed, and who bestowed kingship.

³ There are many flood myths that assert that floods have the potential to obliterate entire cultures in ancient human mythology and folklore. Numerous biblical and mythological books, including the three surviving Babylonian deluge epics: *Ziusudra*, *Utnapishtim* (*Epic of Gilgamesh*), and *Atrahasis* (*Epic of Atrahasis*); the Genesis flood narrative (*Genesis 6:9–9:17*), which has been a recurring theme in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and the respective deluges in *Deucalion and Pyrrha*, which are (*Hesiod in Works and Days, 109–200*). According to *Theogony*, a deluge or huge flood caused by Zeus, who was furious and dissatisfied by the aggressive and misbehavior of the bronze race. (Liritzis et al., 2019).

4.2. Earthquake

In ancient times, human thought and conduct were negatively impacted by our inability to completely eradicate the causes of natural disasters, particularly earthquakes, predict when they would occur, and stop their devastation. For ancient people, the reality of an earthquake was perhaps the most frightening and unknown of all the natural phenomena he had witnessed throughout his life. The accumulation of knowledge and experience built up over generations enabled primitive man to understand how to deal with nature over time. For example, he learned that storms are signaled by certain signs before they occur, and that darkening or strong winds signal danger and that he should return to his cave or other sheltered place. Disasters such as forest fires, floods, etc. are examples of such situations. However, for the ancient man, the movement of the land on which he stood safely had to be different from all other events. Before rational reasoning, ancient civilizations often resorted to gods and the myths they created to explain the origin and nature of the world. Therefore, they saw natural phenomena such as earthquakes, floods, etc. as acts of their gods.

Among the royal correspondence from the Sargonid period of ancient Mesopotamia (722–626 BC), prophetic texts about natural disasters such as earthquakes have been found. If there was a disaster, the king was warned by the gods to "open his ears" and listen to what the gods had to say. The king must perform the Namburbi ritual to prevent the bad omen. Because the god Ea, who created the earthquake, also created a protective ritual against evil, which is the Namburbi ritual (Mandaci, 2020). For example, regarding an earthquake in the Neo-Assyrian period, the oracle Balasî states that it was definitely a bad sign, but opportunely, the gods created the necessary rituals to eliminate the evil of the earthquake. The oracle also emphasizes the moral message of this event sent by the gods, stating that even if all the protective rituals against evil are carried out, the king must be careful (cited in Jean, 2010).

In Greek society, similar to Mesopotamian culture, earthquakes and other natural disasters were thought to be caused by the will of the gods. In the ancient Greek belief system, it was believed that as a result of the wrong actions of humans and their displeasure, the gods became angry and wanted to destroy humanity. This classical system of thought, based on faith, was transformed in the early 6th century BC. Philosophers and scholars from Anatolia were the forerunners of humanity's mental leap. During this period, more rational ideas began to be developed to explain and understand the functioning of nature. The founder of this movement was Thales of Miletus, the first thinker to try to explain nature rationally (Şahin, 2019). Before Thales, earthquakes as the movement of the earth were attributed to Poseidon, perhaps the most feared of the Olympian gods. Poseidon was the god who symbolized the sea among the Olympian gods and who also caused earthquakes (Erhat, 1996).

When the moment his trident landed on the ground, he would shake the earth and upset the sea. That's why he was also called *Enosigaios*, which means "shaker of the earth" (Agizza, 2001). The fact that Poseidon became a myth in this way shows us that ancient people frequently encountered these disasters and somehow attributed meaning to them. They also attributed the earthquake to Poseidon's anger. In other words, in these societies, earthquakes were destructive disasters that could be a reason for punishment (Akyüz 2018). As Şahin (2019) points out, earthquakes in ancient civilizations were not only explained by the god Poseidon's rage and violence. Other events in mythology were also believed to cause earthquakes and similar natural disasters.

In the Iliad, Poseidon identifies himself as the son of Cronos, the brother of Zeus, and the ruler of the underworld, Hades, in the following way: "Three brothers are we, all sprung from Cronus, All of us brought to birth by Rhea-Zeus and I, Hades the third." There were three halves to the world.

Each was given his domain. Hades drew the country of the dead covered in haze and night, while I drew the sea, my foaming eternal home, when we shook the lots. The land and the heights of Olympus are shared by all people, but Zeus created the skies, the clouds, and the lofty, bright sky (Homer 1990). He is a sea god who has the power to cause earthquakes as well as ferocious storms that can destroy Odysseus' raft (Homer 1991). Homer refers to him as the "great god of earthquakes," the "god who shakes the continent," and says that as he walks, the mountains and trees tremble (Homer, 1990).

Thucydides even makes reference to Poseidon's function as an earth shaker. He writes that The Spartans "raised up some helot suppliants from the altar of Poseidon, and had taken them away and killed them. They believe that the great earthquake in Sparta was the result of this." (Thucydides, 1954). In 464 BCE, Sparta experienced a catastrophic earthquake that left much of the city in ruins, killed up to 20,000 Spartans, and sparked an uprising by the helots with the help of other Messenians. Many Greeks believed that the only plausible explanation for an earthquake's destructive power was a vindictive god exhibiting his wrath (Higgins, 2009).

The submerging of Atlantis, another Flood tale from Greek mythology, has a motif with the first one. Plato describes how the once-virtuous Atlantis vanished beneath the sea following a series of earthquakes in the Critias. When the world was split among the gods, the island of Atlantis fell to Poseidon, the god of the water. He raised his offspring there with a mortal lady. (Plato, 1961). But because they frequently mixed with the mortal element, the divine spark within them withered, and as a result, human traits ultimately predominated and the Atlantis behaved sinfully. Zeus made the decision to punish them in order to make them wise again. The Timaeus contains the rest of the story. In a similar way, the sea swallowed the island of Atlantis and disappeared, but later on there were foreboding earthquakes and floods, and they suffered a terrible day and night. As a result, the ocean at that location is now impassable and unsearchable because it is blocked by the shoal mud the island created as it settled.

In the Roman Empire, earthquakes were considered to be bad omens namely prodigies. The majority of prodigies appear to have been incidents that defied Roman ideas of what was normal; there are only a small number of prodigies that appear miraculous or supernatural in modern sense. Republican religion placed a lot of emphasis on prodigies. A prodigy was not an act that a god or goddess committed in the human realm, but rather it was a (un)natural occurrence that suggested that something gravely wrong with the gods. Before or during political events, prodigies were given special attention. If the Senate recognized the sign as a prodigy, they would have been acknowledging that the *pax deorum*⁴ had been violated by this incident. The prodigy demonstrated how the gods' and Romans' relationship had broken down. Even if they weren't damaging, earthquakes were frequently unexpected and unsettling enough to call for a report to the Senate to assess whether they qualified as prodigies. If the Senate classified an earthquake as a prodigy, it was now seen as a matter that the Republic should be concerned about (Higgins, 2009).

⁴ *Pax deorum*, Latin for "peace of the gods," refers to the main objective of Roman official religion: a mutually beneficial state of peace between Rome and its deities, with the gods safeguarding Rome's public welfare (*salus publica*; cf. Cic. *Rab. perd.* 5) And the Romans giving the gods the adoration and cult they desired.

5. CONCLUSION

The essential structure and function of all definitions of relation is personalized, notwithstanding the notable differences in the worldviews of the ancient cultures and their historical changes. This also holds true for catastrophes that can be attributed to divine purpose and design. Humans' interactions with the world can be seen as personal relationships and become meaningful when they are given a personal touch. A meaningful and capable worldview is one that is entirely built as a web of interpersonal connections. Disasters might be considered a portion of God's wrath in this broad sense. God permits humans to rule the world the way they see fit. Disasters serve as a warning that this world does not exist as God intended.

The divine will, which is revealed through earlier divine utterances, is the foundation of human-divine and interpersonal connections in ancient literature (through revelations, prophecies, oracles, and laws). When people follow, the divine-human bond is upheld, and a deity answers with rewards, advantages, and blessings. However, when people disobey, it disrupts the link between them and the divine, and punishment follows. Disasters and other divine warnings might be seen as a type of alert system that warns humans when they are heading in the wrong way. A person who is conscious of their sinfulness may take proactive measures to escape punishment by making confessions, pleading guilty, making atonements, or engaging in cultic practices in addition to changing their behavior.

Every time divine wrath is justified in the Flood myths, it is morally appropriate. Because of their repugnant deeds and refusal to change their evil ways, mankind deserves to suffer the consequences of their acts. For the sake of preventing such catastrophes, repentance and expiation are necessary. However, in other scenarios and cultures, adversity could seem ethically wrong and motivated by malice.

Because people were unable to entirely abolish the causes of natural catastrophes, especially earthquakes, forecast when they would occur, and stop their devastation, it had a significant impact on how people thought and behaved in the past. The actuality of an earthquake was arguably the most terrifying and mysterious natural phenomenon he had ever seen for ancient people. In Greek society, similar to Mesopotamian culture, earthquakes and other natural disasters were thought to be caused by the will of the gods. In the ancient Greek belief system, it was believed that as a result of the wrong actions of humans and their displeasure, the gods became angry and wanted to destroy humanity.

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