

The Legend of the Eagle & the Serpent

The ancient Aztecs believed in many gods, and each god had a job. For example, the sun god brought up the sun. If the sun god was unhappy, he would refuse to bring out the sun and all the crops would die. The Aztecs spent an enormous amount of time making sure that all their gods were happy, time they could have spent gathering food or making needed goods, so they assigned the job of keeping their gods happy to priests. The priests believed the only way to keep so many gods happy all at once was to offer the gods human sacrifice. While some people collected food and made goods, Aztec warriors spent their time capturing people from neighboring tribes so the priests would have someone to sacrifice. This did not make the Aztec popular with their neighbors. The other tribes combined armies to force the Aztecs to leave. The Aztec were shoved from place to place, never welcome, always on the move. One day, Huitzilopochtli, the Aztec god of sun and war, appeared to them while they wandered and promised the Aztecs that they would continue to wander until they saw an eagle, perched on a cactus, holding a snake. This would be the signal that they had found their home. This is where they were supposed to settle down and build a city.

The Aztec wandered through the Mexican desert for 200 years, waiting for their promised sign. One day, a young warrior went ahead, scouting the area for water and food. He came upon an eagle, perched on a cactus, devouring a snake. He could not believe his eyes- this was the promised signal from Huitzilopochtli. The cactus grew out of a rock and was surrounded by an enormous body of water. In the Valley of Mexico, along the swampy shores of Lake Texcoco, the Aztec people built their home on the island city of Tenochtitlan, "the Place of the Prickly Pear Cactus".

