

Lutheran Foundations: A Confirmation Curriculum[©]

It Starts Here! Stories of the Old Testament

The Tomorrow River Lutheran Parish

Year 1, Lesson 5: The Tower of Babel

Just a simple little story for this week – and a chance to deliberately circle back around to the material of the first 4 weeks! Remember, you can always rewatch the videos!

Review

Confirmation

- Is the process of learning enough about the Christian Faith to make beginning promises about our intentions to live as Christians.
- It is the beginning of a very long road. It is not a graduation from learning.

The Bible

- Is the Written Word of God.
- The Bible is True
 - It is true in different ways depending on genre!
- The Bible is the authoritative source of our faith. It is our norming norm.

Lutheranism

- Is a branch of protestant Christianity that flows from the teachings of Martin Luther, an Augustinian Monk who lived and taught 500+ years ago.

The Catechism

- Is a small book of questions and answers about: The 10 Commandments, The Lord's Prayer, The Apostles' Creed, Baptism, The Lord's Supper, Confession and Daily Prayers.
- It is the "intergenerational string" that binds the generations of Lutheran Christians.
- It is intended to be memorized by all Lutheran Christians. Including you!

Creation

- I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth.
- "In the Beginning, God created the heavens and the earth..."
- Creation is Good.

- We are created in the image of God.
- We have dominion over creation and responsibility for creation

The Fall

- However we understand the story, there are some really important lessons for us upon which we are to perpetually meditate:
 - We want to be like God.
 - We want to decide for ourselves what is right and what is wrong.
 - We often choose to disobey the laws that are given for our own good and for our peaceful coexistence with God and with one another
 - Disobeying God's laws has consequences for us, for everyone around us and for the creation itself
 - God is merciful

The First Family AKA Cain and Able

- Two key quotes:
 - "Sin is crouching at your door, it wants to overcome you..." and
 - "Am I my brother's keeper...?"
- Sin has consequences but God is merciful.

The Great Flood

- Almost certainly a catastrophic regional flood.
- So many lifetime lessons for us to learn and struggle with if only we would stop fighting about the extent of the flood!
 - God is aware of what is going on in the world and what each of us is doing.
 - God cares about righteousness and goodness.
 - God is Just. There are consequences for sin and disobedience.
 - Punishment is real.
 - God provides plans and routes of salvation.
 - God saves people who are imperfect!
 - God makes and keeps promises.
 - God can be trusted!
 - God loves the world.
 - God loves us.
- In the New Testament:
 - Jesus thinks the point of the flood is the sudden collapse of worldly powers in the face of God's judgement/will.
 - Peter thinks the point of the flood is to help us to understand baptism.

**You and I are required to know these stories
and to MEDITATE on them for the rest of our lives!**

New Material: The City & Tower of Babel

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ² And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³ And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴ Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." ⁵ The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶ And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." ⁸ So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹ Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

– Genesis 11:1-9 NRSV*

A little helpful vocab:

Shinar: is a region of Mesopotamia/Babyonia. The area is now part of Iraq. The city in question may have been abandoned for a time, but it becomes Babylon – one of the great cities of the ancient world.

Bricks: Mud and chopped straw pressed into molds and then fired in a kiln. Very strong. You could build a very high tower before the bricks on the bottom compressed.

Bitumen: dense, highly viscous, petroleum-based hydrocarbon that is found in deposits such as oil sands and pitch lakes (natural bitumen) or is obtained as a residue of the distillation of crude oil (refined bitumen). In some areas, particularly in the United States, bitumen is often called asphalt, though that name is almost universally used for the road-paving material made from a mixture of gravel, sand, and other fillers in a bituminous binder. Bitumen is also frequently called tar or pitch—though, properly speaking, tar is a byproduct of the carbonization of coal and pitch is actually obtained from the distillation of coal tar.

Britannica, *The Editors of Encyclopaedia*. "bitumen". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19 Dec. 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/science/bitumen>.

The Tower and the City: (It's never just the "Tower of Babel".) There are various ancient stories of how high the tower got before work was halted. These range from Big (like the height of the Empire State Building) to unbelievably ginormous (miles

high). Bottom Line: No one knows. No ruins have ever been found. No foundation has ever been found. No plans have ever been found.

Etiology: The study of causation or origination. An etiological story is a story that tells us how something came into being, or a story of why things are the way they are. This is an etiological story about the origin of different languages.

Linguistics: The scientific study of language. A very complicated and diverse area of study including every part of language.

Language Families: a group of languages that are related by descent from a common ancestral language. English is part of the Germanic Family, which is part of the Indo-European family. There are at least 448 languages in the Indo-European family. Depending on who is doing the counting, there are between 7,139 and 8,494 languages in the world – plus a whole lot more extinct languages!

Our old friend “Erets”: “Erets” is a Hebrew word and it can be rightly translated “earth”, “land”, “ground”, “country”, or even “field”. It can be “everything”, it can be “everything known to me”, it can be “the entire area”, it can be “everything around here”. We talked a lot about this word in our lesson on the Great Flood

And Finally: This is not the only story in the Bible about the differentiation of languages. In the genealogies of Noah’s children in Genesis 10, we are told that Noah’s descendants spread out “in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations”

Between “Erets” and Genesis 10, we are given great freedom to receive the story of the Tower of Babel as something other than a literal history of the origin of **ALL** languages. It is a story about a specific people who had their language scrambled and who were thus spread out. It is not an historical account of where all languages in the world came from! Erets! Erets! If it helps you get your head around it, go back and read the story to yourself again substituting “Erets” everywhere the word “Earth” appears. You will understand.

The Big Money Summary: a group of people decide to build a city and a tower to make a name for themselves and to keep their community together – lest they be scattered over the whole Erets! God sees this and is not amused. In order to stop their project God mixes up their languages so they can’t communicate with one another. They abandon their buildings and drift away from one another.

The Big Money Question: WHY?!? Why would God be so interested in – and upset by – a municipal building project?

There are a bunch of answers from Jewish and Christian teachers throughout the millennia. Those answers tend to fall in one of four buckets:

1. The problem was pride (part 1). These people thought that they could build their own way into Heaven. They refused to acknowledge that they lost the right to heaven in the fall and they thought that they were going to get there without God's help...
2. The problem was pride (part 2). The people thought that they were in charge of where they went and how they lived. It didn't matter to them that God might have some different plan, they wanted to make their own decisions.
3. The problem was a lack of faith. God gave people the rainbow after the flood to learn to trust God. The people of this city didn't want to trust God. They wanted to make their own security. They wanted a tower built to the heavens so that if God did send another flood, they wouldn't drown... they would just climb their big tower and wait it out.
4. The problem was that repeated accomplishments would teach the wrong lessons. God wasn't particularly upset about the tower, but God didn't want the people thinking that there was nothing beyond their powers. God was working a plan to redeem the world and arrogance among humanity would make it that much harder to fix everything...

Which is it? I don't know.

Maybe all of them...

What do you think?

* New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright 1989,
Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches