



The Possibilities of Pentecost (Gen 11:1-9)

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BELIN PENTECOST PLANNING KIT - SERMON OUTLINE

THE INTRODUCTION

Taken from the Greek word, Pentēkostē (“the fiftieth day”), Pentecost is considered one of the most sacred days on the Christian calendar because it symbolizes the “birthday of the church.”

Christians celebrate Pentecost fifty days after Easter Sunday.

In the New Testament, Pentecost was the occasion of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon those gathered in the upper room as described in Acts 2.

Many interpreters of the biblical text connect the gathering of the people in Acts 2 with the scattering of the people in Gen 11.

THE TEXT

As part of the primeval history that begins with the stories of creation and concludes with the birth of Abraham, Genesis 11 prefaces the larger narrative arch of Genesis, which includes the stories of the patriarchs.

After the chaos of The Flood (Gen 6-9), the assurance of the Noahic covenant (Gen 9), and the systemization of community through the genealogies found in the Table of Nations (Gen 10), Genesis 11 tells the story of the Tower of Babel. Here, the people of earth “had one language.”

Gen 11.1 explains that the people are together in the land of Shinar, they decide to build a city with a tall tower, and then something goes wrong. According to Gen 11:4 the people decide to build a tower to establish their name and to avoid being scattered. Upon review, God decides to foil their plans by confusing their language so that they will not understand each other.



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THE FOCUS OF THE SERMON

Historically, interpreters have focused on what went wrong in Gen 11 however this sermon focuses elsewhere. This sermon is less concerned with how humanity's hubris or "thinking too much of themselves" was the thing that caused God to punish the people by confusing their speech and scattering the people. This sermon is most concerned with the possibilities of Pentecost.

In verse 6 readers learn, 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."

When people are together, they have one language (meaning they understand each other), and there is nothing impossible for them.

According to the editorial team employed by Merriam-Webster, to understand means *a*) to know the meaning of something such as the words that someone is saying or a language, *b*) to know how something works or happens, or *c*) to know how someone thinks, feels, or behaves. Synonyms include words like comprehend, grasp, appreciate, and recognize.

To understand is to know and knowing is an up-close, intimate, sometimes uncomfortable enterprise.

[Insert anecdote that highlights the difficulty of understanding another person]

THE APPLICATION

And yet, according to Gen 11:6, speaking the same language and understanding one another are the keys to achieving the impossible.

- What would our world look like if we made an effort to understand each other?
- What would our world look like if we were intentional about understanding each other?
- This sermon does not suggest that we must agree with each other. This sermon is simply inviting us to dream a dream of what it would look like if we took seriously the work of trying to understand.
- Perhaps if we worked to understand each other, we could do the impossible.

[Insert relevant examples of how listening and understanding positively changed an outcome]



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The problem is we do not do the things that move us towards understanding. We have become so comfortable articulating why we are different that we do not look for why and how we are similar.

THE CONCLUSION/THE CHARGE

Let us begin to do the work of understanding each other.

[Insert actionable suggestions appropriate for the specific community]

When we speak the same language and understand each other, nothing we propose to do will be impossible!



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