

**“Speaking the Same Language”
Genesis 11:1–9: The Tower of Babel**

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If as one people

The story of the Tower of Babel is often interpreted as a story about pride. The growing population of people whose ancestors survived the flood made a tower reaching to the heavens “so that we may make a name for ourselves.” Pride is very clearly a component here, but pride is only mentioned once in the story. Hermeneutics might say: it’s not about Pride; it is about language. Speech is mentioned four times in the story, including the opening narration: “Now the whole world had one language and a common speech.” One easy heuristic of speech analysis is to look at how many times something is mentioned in a text.

It’s important to remember that God created with speech, either literally or metaphorically: “And God said, let there be light” (Gen 1:3). And of all God’s creation, only Adam could name things. “He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen 2:19). Speech is powerful, and language is the medium of speech. Note that power was abused by Satan, he tempted with words, by challenging the words of God: “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (Gen 3:1b).

We can see that language is powerful. And effective communication means making connections with other people, the people we are talking to. The people of Babel made a connection: “They said to each other...” (Gen 11:3). Communication takes place where we connect; studying communication is about finding things in common. It focuses on our connections, similarities, more than our differences.

Speaking the Same Language

God himself observes the power of communication when he says, “If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing

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they plan to do will be impossible for them” (Gen 11:6). Being able to speak the same language gives us, as a group of people, the power to accomplish our goals. As social creatures, we have needs that cannot be met individually, but we need others to meet them. Communication is integral to that.

The world today is moving closer to a common speech, English. The internet and the global economy have made English the common language of business. Many Asian countries teach English as part of their regular public education. Here at APNTS we teach in English and require students to have a level of proficiency in English. This accrues two benefits. (1) Almost all the works of Christian Literature and Theology have been translated into English. By learning English, Christian scholars have access to the great body of literature. All these have not been translated into Korean, or Mizo, or Tagalog. (2) It allows us to work together for the Kingdom.

Let us say there are two friends who meet here at APNTS, one from Korea and one from Myanmar. The pastor from Myanmar can visit Korea, preach to his friend’s congregation in English, and the Korean pastor can translate into Korean. When the friend visits Myanmar, the pastor can reciprocate, translating from English into Mizo.

But it’s not just about English; there is nothing that favors English over other languages. Just like French, Latin, Spanish, or Greek before it, travel and commerce have spread English around the world. Like those other common tongues, English facilitates making connections easier—business connections and spiritual connections. It makes connections broader and deeper.

Here at APNTS one required course is communication. It is a practical discipline that makes all the study we do here even more effective and beneficial. The most required course in the United States is what we call public speaking.

They have begun to do this

Communication is a creative act. We can put words together in ways that have never been done before. We can sing songs that have never been sung before. We can tell stories that have never been told before. We can poem poems that have never been poemed before. (Did you see what I did there? I made up a new use for a word. I made poem a verb and put it in the past tense.)

In the story in Genesis, they built a tower reaching to the heaven. I think of this very building we are in! It reaches to the heavens. With a common language we have built a global network of Alums: Pastors, missionaries, district

superintendents; all over the Asia-Pacific region, even all over the world, working to build the Kingdom of God.

You do not just leave here with some credits, or a degree, a piece of paper with your name on it. You leave with connections—connections to other people around the world.

Then nothing they plan will be impossible for them. What do we plan to do here at APNTS? We plan to do "impossible" things. Ministry is not just winning the lost in world areas, but connecting us all in the body of Christ. Language allows us to coordinate and strategize. To maximize our strengths and minimize our weakness.

Now follow me clearly on this next point. Extension courses in specific cultures, conducted in a specific language are great, excellent, wonderful. Not everyone can learn English at a level that allows them to do graduate work here at APNTS. Our faithful students in Myanmar are connecting with other students in Myanmar and will do "impossible" things in Myanmar. The same is true for other extension classes. Those students will do "impossible" things, amazing things, in their places.

But one of the benefits of a residential institution like APNTS is that we connect with students from all over the world. We communicate in the common tongue of the world. And we will do "impossible" things in the whole world. Nothing we plan to do will be impossible for us.

"If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them."

Thank you.