DID PENTECOST REVERSE BABEL?

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Category: Language In the Bible

> *When considering the significance of tongues throughout the pages of Scripture, one may begin to wonder why God desires to hear His praise in every language. Why not just teach everyone Korean, the language of Heaven? Instead, He seems to desire strongly both an array of languages and praising lips from each one. In Revelation 7, readers discover that in eternity, it is not merely one voice that lifts its praise to Almighty God. In eternity, it is one voice in many languages.*

This excellent quote from Ed Stetzer comes from an article which is well worth a read; Why we should all care more about tongues. Ed is a good and thoughtful writer on mission issues and it is well worth adding his blog to your regular reading list. However, this particular article did have one section that raised my hackles just a little.

> *What do we see here?* ***Essentially Acts 2 records the reversal of Babel.*** *Instead of man reaching for the dominion of God, God comes to the dominion of man. In Babel we see man grasping for unity apart from God through their own strength and for their own glory. At Pentecost we see God bringing man together in unity for His glory through His gospel. (Emphasis mine.)*

Those who have followed my writing over the years, will recognise that I have often stated more or less exactly the opposite.

> *Which brings us to Pentecost.* ***Sometimes people say that at Pentecost, God reversed the Tower of Babel, but that is exactly what He didnâ€™t do.*** *At Pentecost, God underlined the linguistic diversity that He introduced at Babel. (Emphasis not in the original).*

So which of us is right?

Well at the risk of sounding wishy-washy, I reckon that we both are. Ed is a missiologist who generally writes about Church planting; he approaches the issue of mission and language diversity from that angle and highlights the direction of mission. I come at the same question from the perspective of a Bible translator and for me, language diversity and its sanctification at Pentecost is the most important issue.

Through reading Ed's work and interacting on twitter, my understanding of Babel and Pentecost has been broadened - I don't know if Ed feels the same, but I hope so.

The broader perspective here is that Scripture is multifaceted and one person's perspective rarely captures all of the meaning in a passage. I need to hear the perspective of mission practitioners in other fields and (more importantly?) the point of view of Christians from very different global

contexts in order to fill out my understanding of God's Word. If the only authors we read are ones who share our cultural and religious heritage we are cutting ourselves off from a broader understanding of Scripture.

By the way, if Ed's comments about centrifugal mission have sparked an interest, you could do far worse than watch this thirty minute video from the John Godingay.