



[Zephaniah 3:9](#)

(9) “ For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,
That they all may call on the name of the LORD,
To serve Him with one accord.

New King James Version

Acts 2:21 (a quotation of Joel 2:38) foretells that "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." [Zephaniah 3:9](#), though, shows that there is another prerequisite to calling on the name of the Lord: There must be a pure language.

In [Zephaniah 3:9](#), the New Kings James Version uses the word "restore," which can be misleading because it implies that all the peoples—all the nations—had a pure language at some point in the past. The Hebrew, though, shows that is not the case. More correctly, the King James Version reads, "I will *turn to* the people a pure language," while the English Standard Version renders it, "I will *change* the speech of the people." This verse is speaking about a coming change rather than a return to something that previously existed.

The word translated as "language" also requires a little analysis. The basic meaning of the Hebrew word is "the termination of something," and it is variously translated as "brim," "brink," "edge," and "shore," which all describe terminations. This word is also translated as "lip," another type of edge or termination point. Building on the idea results in a natural progression to words, speech, and thus to language.

We need to take this one step farther. In Hebrew thought, the lips are not merely the "edge" of the mouth, but the termination point of the heart. While the lips are used in making sounds, the real engine of speech is the heart.

Consider [Proverbs 10:32](#): "The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked what is perverse." Obviously, the lips and mouth have no intelligence on their own, so what is actually in view is the heart, which approves of either acceptable or perverse things.

We see this more clearly in [Proverbs 16:23](#): "The *heart* of the wise *teaches* his mouth, and adds learning to his lips" (emphasis ours). This is also true of the wicked, as [Proverbs 24:2](#) says that the hearts of the wicked devise violence, and their lips stir up trouble. The lips are the instrument, but the instigator is the heart. [Jesus](#) puts this principle so simply, saying, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" ([Matthew 12:34](#)).

Another facet of this prophecy of a pure language is that language continues to develop as people try to describe their reality, which is constantly changing. Because of this, language never stops transforming—for good or ill. Some words fall out of use as what they describe is no longer relevant (or acceptable), and new words are created as circumstances change. Existing words are repurposed, taking on different implications.

As obvious examples, consider how the words "gay" and "queer" have taken on radically different meanings in the last few sexually-focused decades. Likewise, somebody decided we needed a word to describe people attempting to change their sex, so the word "transgender" was cobbled together. The language changed as the culture changed—and as the culture degrades, so does the language.

Currently, we are witnessing an insidious alteration of the meaning of the word "marriage." Although faithful Christians reject the new meaning, which allows for "marriages" other than that of one man and one woman, if time goes on, a new generation will arise within a more profane reality, and the language will adapt because of common usage. Even now, we must often modify the term with descriptors like "biblical" and "traditional."

Language, then, is not simply a vast collection of words, but it is also a reflection of the underlying culture. Therefore, when the people have a pure language, it means that the dominant culture will also have experienced a massive renovation. The pure language will reflect a far better reality because it will include [God](#).

— David C. Grabbe

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