



Isaiah 6:1-7

(1) In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. (2) Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (3) And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. (4) And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. (5) Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. (6) Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: (7) And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

King James Version

Language is not only a collection of words, but also a reflection of the culture it describes. When a people begin speaking a pure language ([Zephaniah 3:9](#)), we know that the dominant culture must have experienced a cataclysmic change from the sinfulness of human society. The pure language reflects a culture that includes [God](#) and His way of life.

The prophet Isaiah is an example of this principle. Isaiah has a vision of the Lord, sitting on His throne in the Temple ([Isaiah 6:1-4](#)). As the majesty of God overwhelms the prophet, he cries out, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of *unclean lips*, and I dwell in the midst of a people of *unclean lips*; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" ([Isaiah 6:5](#); emphasis ours throughout).

The Hebrew word twice translated "lips" here is the same word rendered as "language" in [Zephaniah 3:9](#). Isaiah's response does not necessarily mean that the prophet was in the habit of swearing like a sailor. Undoubtedly, the common tongue of Judah at the time was not pristine, but God's major charge against His people condemned, not the words they were speaking, but their unfaithfulness to Him, particularly regarding their acceptance of paganism. A culture that is far from God will certainly have a debased language, but the real problem was that the Jews of that time were going astray in their hearts, not merely using foul language.

When Isaiah caught a glimpse of the Almighty, he was crushed by the great contrast between the purity of his King compared to his own defilement. Before God could use him, the prophet had to undergo purification (verses 6-7).

Sin begins in the heart, even though it often escapes through the mouth. When Isaiah's iniquity was forgiven and his sin purged, what was really being affected was his heart. His mouth was simply the extension of his heart that was visible, being on the outside of his body. After his purification, it is implied that he had pure lips—pure language—just like in Zephaniah. As a typical Jew, he was still speaking the same basic collection of Hebrew words, but they were now true words arranged honestly. In addition to the absence of obscenity, lying, and evil-speaking, they were now reflecting a different spiritual reality.

It is worth noting that God does not favor one language of man over another. Every language of man is unclean in the sense that *all of them* have been developed by unclean people to describe a defiled reality. None can compare with the inexpressible language Paul heard in his vision of the Third Heaven ([II Corinthians 12:2-4](#)).

In addition, our God is not like the god of the Muslims, which requires that they all learn the same language—Arabic—to call on him. God chose to have His Word recorded in three different languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—each of which uses different words for Deity. God can express His will regardless of the language, and a believer is not required to learn a certain parlance to call on Him.

Hebrew is misappropriated in this way more than Greek or Aramaic, even though it is impossible to know the original pronunciation of God's Hebrew names because only consonants have been preserved. God did not leave us an audio recording of what He wanted to be called. Instead, He left us a written record of His transcendent character and nature. Our faith must be in who and what He is, not in a collection of sounds whose original pronunciation we are guessing at anyway. The Jews of Isaiah's day certainly had a much better idea how to pronounce God's names than we do, but that knowledge did them no good because their hearts were set on the wrong things—their "lips," like Isaiah's, were unclean.

Earlier, when the freed Israelites had the opportunity to worship the God who brought them out of Egypt, they bowed down in front of a *calf* made of gold, and Aaron said, "This is your god [*Elohim*], O Israel . . ." ([Exodus 32:4](#))! The Israelites readily accepted the word *Elohim* being used in this way due to their deplorable understanding of God. The words they spoke in the Hebrew of their day did not reflect spiritual reality because their culture was corrupted. Their hearts were not one with God. Using a Hebrew name for God did not grant them favor in God's eyes, nor will so-called "sacred names" put us in a better standing with *Elohim*. What is needed is a cleansed heart, not a different language.

— David C. Grabbe

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[**What Is the Prophesied 'Pure Language'? \(Part Two\)**](#)

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