



"The beginning of men's rebellion against God was, and is, the lack of a thankful heart."  
—Francis Schaeffer

18-Nov-16

## What Is the Prophesied 'Pure Language'? (Part Two)

As we saw in Part One, 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: "Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your [sin](#) purged'" ([Isaiah 6:6-7](#)).

We understand that 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.

Recall that in [Zephaniah 3:8-9](#), the prophet describes fires of destruction, followed by a pure language and calling on God. Isaiah experienced a similar purification by fire, then spoke a multitude of Messianic prophecies. Fast-forwarding to Pentecost, <sup>AD</sup> 31, when the Holy Spirit was given, the apostles appeared with tongues of fire on their heads. In type, a purification allowed the apostles to be witnesses for [Jesus Christ](#) and to preach [the gospel](#).

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 *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*.

In Part Three, we will look at how the New Testament handles God's names, as well as some final thoughts on how we can call on the name of the Lord with a [pure heart](#).

- David C. Grabbe

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## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [Pure Language Restored](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Advertisements from major corporations seem to be descending to the lowest common denominator. Today we live in a country that praises impulse over restraint, law breaking over law keeping, and foolishness over wisdom. Politically correct language disguises perversity and corruption. Words spoken by ourselves get buried in our DNA. If we claim cancer, diabetes, or weak eyes, we may make the condition more ingrained. We need to be vigilant in our daily conversation, listening carefully to our turn of phrase. When we repeat negative expressions, they become reinforced, and we develop a negative disposition. Our spoken words reinforce our thoughts. Evil thoughts produce evil words which produce an evil culture. Righteous thoughts produce righteous words which produce a righteous culture. Child rearing should not be punctuated with harsh and belittling words, especially if accompanied by absolutist terms like always or never. Harsh words may damage a person's nervous system permanently. Our Elder Brother exercised self-control, refraining to use negative expressions. The power of God's Holy Spirit within us will help us restrain the tongue. In the Millennium, we are promised a new language which will transform the world's culture, having its foundation in God's Law. We already have been learning to think in this language as we meditate on God's Law, having received the gift of the Holy Spirit, receiving the mind of Christ.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Beatitudes, Part 6: The Pure in Heart](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Purity before God is far more than just being clean. John Ritenbaugh explains that to Jesus being pure in heart touches on the very holiness of God!

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