One Manner of Speech

"So it came to pass that all the earth was of one manner of speech, and of one stock of words."
—Genesis 11:1, *Rotherham Translation*

THE GIFT OF TRUE SPEECH has set the human family apart from all other classes of earth's animal kingdom. A loving Heavenly Father endowed earth's first parents with the ability to communicate intelligently with one another, and they were also given the skill to write and to record their words. Adam and Eve received an adequate vocabulary for everyday use, but it could be expanded upon with new words as they were found necessary and appropriate.

A FORM OF COMMUNICATION

It is known that the animal kingdom also possesses the ability to communicate with other beings of the same species, sometimes with a very high level of sophistication. Language usage among the human family represents a higher level of organization and form, and is a systematic means by which ideas and feelings may be expressed with one another.

Speech usage characterizes and identifies various communities of people according to its size, type, or race. Various dialects identify certain forms or varieties that exist within a particular language group, some of which may branch off into other languages over time.

A GIFT FROM GOD

Language did not originate with man, but is a special gift that came from our all-wise Heavenly Father. This fact is established by God's Word, as recorded when Moses declined his instructions to be a spokesman for him. "Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue. And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say." (Exod. 4:10-12) God then provided Aaron—Moses' brother—to speak for him.—vs. 14

ADAM TO ABRAM

The Book of Genesis includes Moses' original genealogical records which provide an important account of man's early history, but more importantly it traces the lineage of the promised seed of Abraham. The language Adam used is believed to be Hebrew, a tongue derived from the name Eber, which means 'to cross over' and is a term associated with the flood era. Eber was a descendant of Shem from whom the chosen children of Israel establish their ancestry. (Gen. 10:21) Shem, who

was born before the flood lived to within four hundred years of the birth of Abraham, who was a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13) and the progenitor of Isaac, the typical seed of promise.—Gen. 21:1-5

The 'one manner of speech' and 'one stock of words' that is identified in our featured scripture and spoken by Adam, was the common language of all who lived during earth's early history. The life spans of Adam and his descendants—Methuselah, Shem, and others that lead to Abraham's day—spanned many centuries of time and often overlapped each other by several years. It is reasonable to conclude that the Hebrew language was the common tongue throughout this long period of time.

CONFUSION OF TONGUES

With mankind's progressive fall into sin and death, the selfish purposes of men were seen by God to have no limits. "GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5) When men later conspired to build a city with a tower that would reach to heaven, God prevented them from doing it, and said, "Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel [confusion, *Marginal Translation*]; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."—Gen. 11:7-9

The Heavenly Father's intervention wisely prevented even more rapid decline and degradation of the human family. A dramatic scattering of peoples took place with the dispersion of Noah's three sons. From Shem were derived the Jewish and other Semitic races; Ham was the ancestor of the black races; and Japheth's descendants are largely traced to the European nations. Those who were able to understand each other stayed together and formed the various families of languages, some of which are yet spoken and clearly distinguishable.

LANGUAGES AND DIALECTS

Although statistics vary, those who study languages, their changing patterns, and rapid decline generally agree that there are about 7,000 different languages and dialects spoken in the world today. All languages, including Hebrew, have changed over time, and some dialects are in the process of diverging. It is not always clear to determine exactly when they may have reached the stage where they become separate languages. When two people find each other's speech unintelligible, they are usually thought to be speaking different languages rather than dialects. There are at present about 200 languages that have a million or more native speakers.

Mandarin Chinese is by far the largest group in the world today, and is presently being spoken as a native language by approximately 875 million people. English is spoken by about 340 million people, but has a far more worldwide distribution than all other spoken languages. It is an official language in 52 countries as well as many smaller colonies and territories. In addition, nearly one third of all the

people in the world are able to understand and speak English to some degree. It has become the most useful language to learn for international travel and commerce, and is now the accepted language of international diplomacy.

ENGLISH PREDOMINANCE

The British Empire extended its power across the globe centuries ago, and its native language became widespread. English was thus taught as a second language in many faraway places including India, South Africa, Australia, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. As America grew in power and status, it too spread the English language, and is now being learned as a second language by many students in Europe and other places.

The spread of English across the globe is a major event in modern history. Speech is fundamental not just to communication, but to the very process of learning. No single language has ever approached such widespread use as English, and for the first time in history it has been possible to denote one language as being predominant.

Nearly every other serious contender for that status is no longer a factor. Spanish alone is extending its influence and status especially within the United States. French has lost its international dominance, while Portuguese Africa is abandoning Portuguese.

Outside of either Germany or Russia these languages are seldom heard. The Japanese are also learning English, while the Mandarin and Cantonese languages are not advancing beyond their native speakers within China. In Ethiopia, the street signs

and business billboards are now in English, beneath the native Amharic, and many of the world's new Muslims are also learning English rather than Arabic. English is now used as a means of communication and commerce in many areas of life in India.

The United Nations conducted a survey a few years ago among its 189 member states and asked what language they wanted to use for communication with embassies from other countries. More than 120 chose English, 40 selected French, and 20 wanted to use Spanish. Those who chose English to be the common language included all of the former Soviet republics, most of the Arab world, and Vietnam.

English is also the dominant language used in electronic communication. About 75% of the world's mail, telexes, and cables are in English. Approximately 60% of the world's radio programs are in English, and about 90% of all internet traffic. The percentage of internet users who are not native English speakers is increasing rapidly, especially in Asian countries.

UNWRITTEN TONGUES

The study of language distribution and how it has evolved around the world involves many complex issues. There have been numerous migrations of people that have resulted in most large nations now having many different language groups within their respective borders. It is estimated that in the United States there are at least 165 languages spoken today, with many of them unwritten. Therefore, it is not exactly true to describe this country as being an English-speaking nation. The same situation applies to other multicultural nations as well.

Certain parts of the world have unusually high concentrations of different language groups. For example, researchers point out that there are around 900 native languages spoken by the few million people who inhabit New Guinea and its neighboring islands. This represents a very high number of languages being spoken by a very small percentage of earth's people. Many of these and other languages are unwritten, and many more of them are disappearing.

DEFINING CULTURES

Language defines a culture through the people who speak it. Words that describe a particular cultural practice or idea may not translate precisely into some other language. Many endangered languages have oral customs including their stories, songs, and histories that are passed on to the younger generations. Some of these groups have interacted closely with their natural world for centuries, and they often have profound insights into the land, plants, animals, and ecosystems in which they live. Much of what people know about their natural surroundings is encoded only in oral languages, with no written form. With the extinction of a language an entire culture is thus lost.

VANISHING LANGUAGES

Linguistic specialists report that approximately 2,000 languages now have less than 1,000 speakers within its community. They further estimate that about half of the world's present languages are no longer being spoken by the younger generation. These threatening indications point to the first major steps in the extinction of these particular voices.

An interesting article that addresses this subject was published by the *Los Angeles Times* (September 19, 2007) under the title "Researchers Say A Language Disappears Every Two Weeks." It was submitted by staff writer Thomas H. Maugh, who we quote in part. "One of the world's 7,000 distinct languages disappears every 14 days, an extinction rate exceeding that of birds, mammals, or plants, researchers say. At least 20% of the world's languages are in imminent danger of becoming extinct as their last speakers die off, compared with about 18% of mammals, 8% of plants, and 5% of birds."

In his article, Maugh also quoted recent and relative comments from David Harrison, who is presently the Associate Director of the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages, and a Linguist at Swarthmore College, who said, "'The extinction of a language translates into a loss of knowledge. When we lose a language, we lose centuries of thinking about time, seasons, sea creatures, reindeer, edible flowers, mathematics, landscapes, myths, music, the unknown, and the everyday. Half of the world's languages have disappeared in the last 500 years, and half of the remainder are likely to vanish during this century.'

HOT SPOTS

"Harrison and Living Tongues Director Gregory Anderson have identified five language 'hot spots' where the extinction rate is particularly high, they said at a news conference sponsored by the National Geographic Society, which supports their research. One such area encompasses Oklahoma, Texas, and New Mexico, where 40 languages spoken by Native

Americans are at risk. Only five elderly members of the Yuchi tribe, for example, are fluent in the Yuchi language, which may be unrelated to any other language in the world."

Another area of particular concern in North America is located in the Pacific Northwest, a region that includes the states of Oregon and Washington in the United States as well as British Columbia in Canada. There are presently 54 languages spoken in this area, and every one of them is endangered. It is reported that the youngest speaker in some places may now be over 60 years of age, with none of the younger generation able to carry on the culture. There were once 27 native languages spoken in the state of Oregon alone.

Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant and indigenous languages found in South America. They continue to threaten the 113 languages that yet survive in aboriginal communities, especially in Ecuador, Columbia, Peru, Brazil, and Bolivia. These areas have very high density of speakers but little documentation.

Other hot spots are found in the area of Northern Australia where many native groups splintered from each other during conflict with white settlers. At the present time, there are 153 Aboriginal languages spoken in small documented communities. Researchers point out that there are threatened locations found in Eastern Siberia, Russia, China and Japan where there are now 23 language groups. Government policies have forced most of these minority communities to use the national and regional languages, and there are few elderly speakers who can speak their native language fluently.

THE EFFECT OF WORDS

The words that proceed out of our mouths reflect the disposition and ability to control our emotions. They serve as an index of the heart, display our inward thoughts, and mark the degree of spiritual growth and understanding. Words are also a vehicle by which we learn things, and are especially valuable when we are taught by the wonderful words of God. "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding; To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity." (Prov. 1:2,3) Some will listen, while others will not heed the instructions from God's Word. Solomon then said, "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels." (vs. 5) He then focuses on the basis of our understanding. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."—vs. 7

One who has thus learned wisdom and understanding from our Heavenly Father's words, and is cognizant of his own words and actions, will proceed in the ways of Truth and righteousness. "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."—Prov. 16:32

TAMING THE TONGUE

Learning to tame the tongue should be a high priority in the Christian's walk in the narrow way, and the utmost intent in the consecrated heart and spiritual life of God's children. James wrote, "My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. For in many

things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." (James 3:1,2) None of us is perfect, and we commit unintentional violations in connection with our walk in newness of life. The one who has control of his words thus controls his own body. The New Creature in Christ Jesus must strive for greater discipline.

James makes a powerful comparison by pointing out, "Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body." (vs. 3) The small bit in the horse's mouth controls the actions of the very powerful animal. Using another and even greater contrasting illustration, James says, "Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth." (vs. 4) The small bit in the horse's mouth, and the rudder of a great ship have the means to direct a great power.

The tongue also has great power to influence large numbers of people for either good or bad purposes. "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison."—vss. 5-8

Although the tongue is not very large, it is possible for it to do more damage than all other members of the human body. It may be used to speak kind words and express loving thoughts, or it can scatter seeds of evil intent that may continue to embitter the lives of others for generations to come.

THE HEART'S TREASURE

Jesus taught, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (Luke 6:45) Our Lord's reference to the heart points to the fact that our words serve as an index to our Christian growth and development of character. As consecrated Christian believers, we seek to grow in the knowledge and spirit of the Truth. It means to stand for righteousness and "sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you." (Titus 2:8) "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."—Col. 4:6

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul wrote, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Rom. 10:10) When he wrote to the Hebrew brethren, he said, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."—Heb. 13:15

A PURE LANGUAGE

The Prophet Zephaniah was looking down the long stream of time when he wrote about a "pure

language" that would one day be instituted for the blessing of all earth's people. (Zeph. 3:9) A new 'pure language' of Truth will become the basic foundation upon which our Lord Jesus will set up his righteous kingdom. The prophet first spoke about the Heavenly Father's indignation and fierce anger that would be directed against the nations during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. (vs. 8) He then makes clear the fact that after the present earthly powers and institutions are devoured by the fire of his jealousy, that he will then bless the people with a common voice in which they may all know and speak the Truth. "Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."—vs. 9

The Psalmist David used the same word "pure," when he wrote, "Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation."—Ps. 24:3-5

THE LANGUAGE OF PRAISE

Under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, the emphasis will be directed toward those who have a single-hearted purpose to be loyal to the Divine rule, and a determined opposition against sin in its many forms. The pure language of Truth will include the right to life under a restored society and on a perfected earth. Under the administration of Christ's glorious kingdom, the nations will learn

the true knowledge of God's ways and will worship him as their blessed Savior. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea."—Isa. 11:9

"They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jer. 31:34) It is not unrea-sonable to consider the possibility that Hebrew may once again be the common language that will be heard over all the earth, the 'one manner of speech and one stock of words' as spoken by father Adam. ■