

# **A UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE**

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The Plain Truth  
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WHY are there so many languages in the world today? WHY not just one common tongue? WHEN and where did mankind become multilingual? WHAT brought about this diversity of languages? WILL the world ever have a universal language?

TODAY'S world is a DIVIDED world -- in its politics, religion, ideologies and in its social order. It is also hopelessly divided by uncounted languages and dialects. Why?

## **Thousands of Languages**

According to the "Encyclopedia Americana" there are about 3,000 to 4,000 languages in the world today. The "Encyclopaedia Britannica" says there are anywhere from 2,500 to 5,000 languages in the world.

The truth is, nobody really knows how many languages and dialects there are in the world. All are agreed, however, there are at least a few thousand languages spoken by the earth's inhabitants.

Scores of languages (dialects) are spoken in CHINA. INDIA has "845 distinct languages and dialects." The USSR, 112 different languages. And in West Africa approximately 60 million natives speak over 400 languages. Perhaps that explains why Ghana has made English its official tongue.

Each of these nations whose peoples speak different languages or dialects are seriously handicapped -- even greatly weakened -- by their multi-language culture.

One of the chief reasons for Britain's and America's strength is found in their one language. They have been united in a common tongue -- the English language!

Each year, countless billions of dollars are spent in studying foreign languages, in translating millions of books, articles, periodicals and other reading material, and in overcoming innumerable misunderstandings -- all brought about through language barriers!

Inventors have tried to construct TRANSLATING MACHINES to overcome the language-barrier difficulties -- but all to no avail! The idea is to make a machine which will automatically translate material (fed into it in the form of the spoken or written word) from one language to another!

One such machine is reported to have translated the English proverb, "Out of sight, out of mind" from English into the German equivalent of "Invisible idiot!"

## **Needed -- a World Language!**

Anyone who has traveled extensively in the world has experienced the utter frustration caused by being unable to communicate with other nationalities because of a language barrier! Just last summer, while traveling through ten countries on the Continent of Europe, I experienced the language barrier. The language barrier can be embarrassing at times. It can also be very exasperating!

My wife and I and two of our friends stopped to eat breakfast in a small cafe in Northern Italy. It so happened that none of us spoke Italian, and the Italians at this cafe spoke not a word of English.

Did you ever try ordering breakfast from a foreigner who didn't understand a word you said? Well, just try it some time and see how difficult it is! We tried to convey to these Italians that we wanted toast, eggs, butter, honey, milk and coffee.

Believe me, it was a most difficult task to get those Italians to understand just good, plain English! We resorted to the international language of gestures, and I think we even drew pictures to try to get across our meaning. Repeatedly, the Italian waiter would disappear into the kitchen and bring out another item of food -- only to have us shake our heads, thereby showing him that it wasn't what we had "asked" for.

If I recall correctly, it was not too difficult to get across to him that we wanted eggs, milk and some of the other items. But the sticky one was the honey! It was only with a great deal of perseverance, and a certain amount of ingenuity, that we were at last able to convey to this Italian what we really wanted -- honey! I think we finally drew a picture of a bee and a piece of honeycomb. He finally got the point, but had to inform us that he didn't have any honey. We left him a generous tip in appreciation for his patient efforts in helping us overcome our language difficulty.

Yes, it can be difficult -- time consuming and very exasperating -- trying to communicate with another when neither of you understands the other's language.

### **Why So Many Tongues?**

WHY is the world so hopelessly divided into thousands of languages? WHEN did the world become this way? And what prevents the world from devising a world language which could be adopted by all nations? Or, has this already been tried -- unsuccessfully?

Before we answer these questions, we must go back over 4,000 years in history. The time -- soon after the Flood. The races and families of men began to multiply. One man became especially ambitious! This despot Nimrod began to rise above his fellow men and organize them into city states (Gen. 10:8-11).

How many languages were there at that time? "AND THE WHOLE EARTH WAS OF ONE LANGUAGE, AND ONE SPEECH" (Gen. 11:1) is the answer.

At that point in the history of mankind, the various branches of the human family rebelled against the government of God. They wanted one world of their own. "And they said to one another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime [bitumen] had they for mortar.

"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and LET US MAKE US A NAME [let us become famous], lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (verses 3, 4).

But -- their Creator, the Almighty God of heaven, saw what man was about to do. He acted. He confounded or divided their speech.

### **Why God Confused Man's Speech**

But why? The answer is revealed in verses 6-9: "And the Lord said, Behold, THE PEOPLE IS ONE [that is, they are UNITED], and they have all ONE language; and this they BEGIN to do: and NOW NOTHING WILL BE RESTRAINED FROM THEM, WHICH THEY HAVE IMAGINED TO DO.

"Go to," said God, "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; 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."

Many have read over this account. Few, however, have really understood its terrible import! Why did God object to the people having one language? And why did He not want them to be "one" -- that is, united?

The Eternal God well understood the almost unlimited capacity of the human mind which He himself had created! God in heaven knew that, if these rebellious human beings remained united, speaking ONE LANGUAGE, they would pool their mental and physical resources -- FOR DESTRUCTIVE PURPOSES!

It was not that God objects to man's having one language. He knew, however, that MAN WOULD, by his accumulated knowledge, utterly destroy the whole world and all life -- if He did not intervene - - and quickly!

So, mercifully, Almighty God in heaven divinely intervened in the affairs of mankind on this earth! It became necessary for God to step in and CONFOUND or CONFUSE man's language so that the different families (which were later to become tribes and nations) would become hopelessly CONFUSED and DIVIDED among themselves. They would not, then, be able to combine their scientific and technological knowledge. Had the Creator not intervened and confounded man's language at the Tower of Babel, men would have raced along in the acquisition of scientific knowledge. Mankind would undoubtedly have advanced in scientific and technological knowledge to such a degree that the nations would have discovered how to use the atom even before the time of Christ.

God Almighty, however, ordained that He would let man follow his own codes of ethics, devise his own human politics and governments, establish his own forms of religion, and in general, go his own way FOR 6,000 years. After which, God would send Jesus Christ to this earth to rescue mankind from the brink of world suicide, and show many how to live a life of happiness, of accomplishment, of peace and prosperity.

That divine act put an end to mankind's "ONE" language. Man's unified efforts to build the Tower of Babel was the signal for Almighty God to intervene and separate races and families by giving each race and family the language which the Creator wanted that particular people to speak. THE RACES AND NATIONS HAVE REMAINED DIVIDED LINGUISTICALLY EVER SINCE!

Now let us see HOW mankind began, in the latter part of the 19th Century, to try to undo God's work of confounding the language at Babel.

### **ESPERANTO and Other World Languages**

Johann Martin Schleyer, a German Roman Catholic clergyman and linguistic scholar, invented a universal language, called "Volapük". He published "Volapük" in 1880. This world language was based "partly on English," but alas, it had many inconsistencies and weaknesses and so its adherents gave it up as a bad language. It was rejected!

In 1887, a Russian Jew, Lazarus Ludwig Zamenhof ("Dr. Esperanto") published his now-famous work, "Esperanto". This artificially created language was a mixture of Continental European languages -- included strong elements of Latin, Italian, French, German, English, Slavic; it has been

referred to as "bad Italian." Many will be surprised to learn that "Esperanto" is spoken or read by about one and one-half million people!

"By 1950, the Esperantists could point to 5,000 published books and a number of journals. Short-wave news broadcasts in "Esperanto" averaged 150 a month. Theirs was the only constructed language which had a worldwide body of living speakers (about 1,500,000), was being taught in more than 600 schools by 7,000 teachers and was being used widely in international gatherings" ("Ency. Britannica", 1960 ed., art. "Universal Language").

The Third Assembly of the League of Nations, in 1922, even went so far as to endorse "Esperanto". During World Wars I and II, "Esperanto" was used for political propaganda and underground activities. It was employed by the Red Cross and in the prisoner-of-war camps. Many radio stations in Europe and America have broadcast in "Esperanto".

But "Esperanto", too, was weighed in the balance and found wanting. It has not proven to be the language which the world was looking for. Others too have been devised and failed -- "Interlingua", "Gloria", "Ido", "Langue Bleue", "Novial", "Udiom Neutral".

Some have advocated taking a "living" language such as English, French, Spanish, German or Russian and making that into an international language. This would never work! Nationalistic jealousies and rivalries would doom such an attempt to utter failure. But, believe it or not, a world language -- a universal tongue -- is coming, and soon!

### **God Uses Different Languages**

It is common knowledge that the Old Testament Scriptures were inspired in the HEBREW language, with a few fragmentary portions being written in ARAMAIC.

Though the Hebrew language is expressive in many respects, yet it has its limitations. It was not the tongue which Almighty God wanted to use as the tool through which He would reveal to mankind the mystery of the Kingdom of God, the Gospel or Good News of His soon-coming Kingdom!

GREEK became the New Testament language God chose through which He revealed the Good News of His Kingdom to the world.

God had allowed Alexander the Great to spread the Greek LANGUAGE and culture over much of the known world in the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Jesus Christ. The Greek language had taken deep root by the time Christ and the apostles began their ministry. The New Testament was not only written in Greek, but much of the preaching of the apostles was done in that language. But, even the Greek language had its shortcomings.

### **Then God Chose English!**

Strange as it may seem, Almighty God raised up the ENGLISH language as His chief instrument through which He would publish and proclaim the Good News of His soon-coming Kingdom to most of the world -- at the close of this age! But why English? English is today the world's number one language.

"English is currently the world's most irresistible language circling the planet at a phenomenal rate.

"SPOKEN AS FIRST LANGUAGE BY 250 MILLION PEOPLE and as a SECOND LANGUAGE BY HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS MORE, widely dispersed English is becoming the UNIVERSAL TONGUE OF TRADE, DIPLOMACY, SCIENCE and SCHOLARSHIP. Pilots of all nations use it for airways communication .... In emerging Asia and Africa, polyglot people take up English as the only

way to comprehend their neighbours. The Chinese Communists speak English in propaganda broadcasts to East Africa. The Russians use it in broadcasts to the Far East.”

Over 60% of all the world's radio programmes are broadcast in English, and over 70% of the world's mail is written and addressed in the English language.

One can travel into any part of the world and nearly always find someone who can speak English. English is being taught in many schools, colleges and universities throughout virtually every nation on earth.

### **India's Lesson**

India received her independence from Britain in 1947. In 1950, Nehru's Central Government proclaimed that HINDI would be the official language of India from that time forward. This transition from English to Hindi was to have been completed by 1965. But innumerable snags were encountered by the Indian Government in its drive to make Hindi the official language of India.

English has been the common language of the educated Indians for over a century. About 13 million upper-class Indians (3%) speak English fluently. If English were to be completely abolished in India, chaos would certainly follow!

"Finally the so-called 'Save Hindi' Campaign was called off. The announcement, significantly, was published in English. In Parliament, Prime Minister Nehru declared that for an indefinite period English would continue as an 'associate official language.' While Hindus listened in silence and non-Hindi-speaking legislators cheered, Nehru termed ENGLISH 'THE MAJOR WINDOW FOR US TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD.

"We dare not close that window,' he said. 'And if we do, it will spell peril to our future.'" ("Life", Feb. 12, 1962.)

The FRENCH language used to be the international language of diplomacy, but English has now generally replaced it. English is the number one language used in the United Nations. About 53 member states receive regular transcripts of speeches and proceedings in English as compared with twenty-seven which request drafts in the French language.

Only 65 million people now speak French as a first language; "less than one-fourth of the U.N.'s 111 member nations still use it in debates" ("Time", Nov. 29, 1963).

It is interesting to note that multi-dialect Chinese is spoken by more people (about 600 million) as a PRIMARY language than any other tongue. But the myriads of Chinese dialects make it impossible for many of the Chinese to clearly understand one another's speech.

In all, ABOUT 850,000,000 to 900,000,000 (nearly a BILLION) PEOPLE EITHER READ, SPEAK OR UNDERSTAND ENGLISH! Those who speak English cover about one-quarter of the globe.

Not only is English written, broadcast, spoken and understood on every continent, but it has come to be the "lingua franca", the international language of diplomacy, scholarship, science, commerce and sport. Despite the political ferment in Arab lands of the Middle East, English continues to be the number one language. In spite of Egyptian animosity toward America and Britain, Cairo's "Egyptian Gazette" recently declared: "English is not the property of capitalist Americans, but of all the world."

### **The Gospel in English**

Now one can clearly see WHY God has chosen the English language as the number one language through which He would reach the inhabitants of the earth with His Good News in this end-time age!

Through The WORLD TOMORROW broadcast and The PLAIN TRUTH magazine, NEARLY 30 MILLION PEOPLE (nearly 1 out of 10 of all the English-speaking peoples) ARE NOW BEING REACHED EACH WEEK WITH THE TRUE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST! (This very Work of God is also proclaiming the Good News of God's Kingdom in German, French and Spanish!)

English is a fairly easy language to learn. Its grammar is simple; it is a very versatile tongue. It is the most expressive language in the world.

The Romance languages -- Latin, French, Spanish and Italian -- are very good for expressing human emotions and feelings. The German language is good for science -- and giving commands! But the English language is an all-purpose language.

One of the reasons for this is the simple fact that the English language contains words from many languages. It is derived from Hebrew, Sanskrit, Greek, Latin, German, French, Italian, as well as miscellaneous elements of Russian, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic and American Indian and other tongues. This gives English a somewhat international flavour and appeal. It has been called "a concentration of many languages."

Though English is easy to learn, is versatile and expressive -- yet it, too, has its weaknesses, inconsistencies and limitations! IT IS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST DIFFICULT LANGUAGES TO SPELL CORRECTLY.

### **A World Language Coming -- Soon!**

A world language is coming soon! The whole earth will soon be united in one common tongue -- in peace and harmony.

Many Bible prophecies show that God will send His Son, Jesus Christ, back to this earth before the close of this 20th Century -- this time to prevent mankind from annihilating himself (see Mat. 24:21-22; Dan. 12:1 and Jer. 30:7).

Micah 4 and Isaiah 11 vividly picture the time when the Kingdom of God will be established on this earth. This will be an era of unparalleled peace, happiness and prosperity! Jesus Christ will rule the earth for 1,000 years -- one full Millennium of worldwide, Utopian blessings on this earth.

One of the great blessings which Almighty God will again grant to all nations during this 1,000-year rule of Christ will be a universal, worldwide language! This is clearly revealed in the third chapter of Zephaniah.

Notice this prophecy. God will "gather the nations" and "assemble the kingdoms," to pour out upon them His "fierce anger" -- because of their sins (Zeph. 3:8)! This prophecy is unmistakably clear. It refers to the same time as is portrayed in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19 -- the time when all nations will gather to fight against Jesus Christ -- at His second coming! They do not want any divine authority over them. What does the victorious Christ do? Here is the answer, in Zephaniah 3.

The time setting for Zephaniah 3:9 is millennial! God solemnly promises, "FOR 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." Yes, God Almighty is going to give all nations "a pure language" so that they may "all" call upon His name and serve Him in unity of purpose.

At that time, the earth shall no longer be in a state of confusion. The world will not continue to be divided by thousands of languages. It will not be hampered by a Babylon of tongues. God will establish a pure, simple to learn, and effective language over the whole earth.

What language will God establish during the 1,000-year rule of the Kingdom of God upon the earth? The Scriptures do not directly reveal which tongue will become the universal, "pure language"! We'll have to wait and see! But it may well be based on English. For after all, God used Hebrew and Greek when each was an international tongue. Today it is English. But that will not mean that a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew will disappear!

But this we do know -- it will be a "pure" language -- not one filled with names of pagan gods and goddesses, and foolish superstitions -- nor vulgar expressions. The names of the days of the week, the months of the year, and of the pagan holidays, which masquerade as "Christian," will disappear. No more goddess of LUCK -- no more THOR'S day (Thursday) -- no more GEMINI space shots, etc. etc.

Through the instrumentality of a pure language -- a universal, world language -- God will at last unite all nations under His Utopian rule! But not until the nations first repent of their sins!

Thank God, the veritable babble of thousands of languages is destined to vanish from the earth -- in the very near future!