

## **“The Language of Ashdod”**

Words are critically important. They convey meaning, and if correctly chosen, they allow us to accurately communicate with each other. But, if we're careless with our words, great confusion is often the result. People can be misled because someone didn't use the right language to convey a thought or concept.

There's a story in the Old Testament about God's people losing their ability to speak God's language. It's recorded in the book of Nehemiah.

**Nehemiah 13:23-24 “In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: And their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.”**

The people of God committed a grave sin here, that resulted in their losing their uniqueness. The language of God became corrupted by the language of paganism. The Bible says they spoke the language of Ashdod. Did you know that that language is still alive in the world today? In fact, some Christians even speak it quite fluently.

It was about 400 B.C. and it had been a hundred years or so after the Jews returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile. Nehemiah was appointed governor by the Persian king Artaxerxes, and he set out to rebuild the broken walls of the city and restore the true worship of God. He led the people to confess, to turn from their sins and rededicate themselves to the Lord. They agreed to be a holy people and separate themselves to God. This means that they were to remain separate from the foreigners around them. They were not to intermarry with other nations and become polluted by the sin and evil around them. For example, on the day that the new wall was dedicated, the Bible says this about what the people did:

**Nehemiah 13:1 “On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found written, that the Ammonite and the Moabite should not come into the congregation of God for ever;”**

God has always expected His people to be a separate and holy people, and in this case, God was very specific. He forbade them from marrying any of the women of these foreign and pagan nations.

Well, all was going well for a time, until Nehemiah had to go away on official business. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how long he was gone, but it was long enough for the people to go astray. In his absence, the temple was forsaken and the service of God was once again corrupted and profaned. When Nehemiah returned and saw what had happened, he was angry and, once again, he set out to purify the nation. One of the things that he found that greatly upset him was that the Jews had married pagan women. They had directly disobeyed God and married outside of their own nation!

You see, God had reasons for forbidding His people from marrying pagans; one being because of the evil influence their pagan wives would have on them. They would turn their hearts away from the Lord. That still happens among the people of God today. Sometimes, a Christian will marry a non-Christian with good intentions of bringing their unbelieving husband/wife to Christ. But, more times than not, it works

the other way. In time, the Christian gives in to the pressure and the worldly values of their spouse, ending up spiritually weak or unfaithful altogether.

That's exactly what happened to these Jews in Judah. They married pagan women and the Bible says it wasn't long until they didn't even talk like Jews anymore. They married women from Ashdod, and instead of those women learning to speak the Jew's language, the Jewish husbands learned to speak the language of Ashdod. Not only that, but we're also told that they could not speak in the language of the Jews any longer. What was Nehemiah's reaction?

**Nehemiah 13:25-27 "And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?"**

There's an important lesson in this passage for us today: just as God expected the Jews to be a holy and separate people back then, He also expects spiritual Israel—His church, His bride—to remain faithfully separated unto Him today as well.

**II Corinthians 6:14-18 "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."**

That's not only true when it comes to heathen idolatry, but it's true in regard to any kind of false religion. The Bible repeatedly warns us that there will be false teachers who promote false doctrines and false religions, and that to compromise with such is not only dangerous, but it's wrong.

There are many false doctrines in the world today, and not only are they not taught in the word of God, but they are the doctrines of men. They're not only NOT taught in the scriptures, but are contrary to what IS taught in the scriptures. They result in people being led away from the truth of apostolic Christianity. Because many Christians don't heed the warnings, and they compromise with error, they begin speaking the language of the religions around them instead of the language of God which we read in the Bible. When Christians speak the language of Ashdod, they convey false concepts and promote erroneous doctrines.

The Bible teaches that Christians are to use Bible language to express Bible concepts.

**I Peter 4:11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;"**

*"Oracles" means an utterance, something spoken. So, Peter is simply saying if a man speaks, he is to speak as God has spoken. Friends, words are important. We are to use them very carefully.*

**I Corinthians 2:12-13 “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we (speaking of the apostles of Christ) might know the things that are freely assumed to us of God. Which things also we (apostles and prophets of the first century) speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”**

In other words, the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets, who gave us the scriptures, with the very words that God wanted used to convey His will to men. Words ARE significant, and every word in the original text of scripture is there for a reason. So, we need to be careful that we don't play fast and loose with the word of God, going about speaking in a way that injects human reasoning and manmade doctrine into the text.

With that said, there are many, many things that people say in religion today that simply are not found in the word of God. They are not even parallel to what is taught in the Bible; rather, they are in addition to it, contrary to it, and they help propagate many a false doctrine that is held in the so-called 'Christian' world today.

So, what IS the modern language of Ashdod? Let me give you a few examples.

First of all, some speak the language of Ashdod when it comes to how people are saved. Do you ever hear Christians talking about “*accepting or inviting Jesus into your heart?*” Well, that sounds good, spiritual and accurate. It's so common to hear someone say that *if you want to be saved, you simply ask Jesus to come into your heart and save you. Or accept Jesus and let Him become your personal Lord and Savior.* We've all heard those expressions time and time again. We've heard them so often that one would think that there were several verses of scripture where people are told by preachers of the gospel to do that very thing. But what we find when we examine the scriptures is that that's Ashdodic language. That's not God's language. That's the vernacular of denominational evangelists, not the language of the apostles.

The book of Acts is a record of the apostles preaching the gospel to the world, beginning at Pentecost. There are several times in the book of Acts where we can read about people being saved from their sins after hearing the gospel preached, and not one single account tells of anyone being told to *accept or receive Jesus into their hearts* to be saved. Hear me out.

**Acts 2:38 “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”**

That's what Peter said, but strangely, that's not what most preachers today tell people who want to know how to be saved.

**Acts 3:19 “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out...”**

We also read in **Acts 8** where Simon believed and was baptized, and where the eunuch of Ethiopia confessed that he believed in Christ as the Son of God and was baptized. Saul was told the following in **Acts 9** and recounts for us in **Acts 22:16**:

**Acts 22:16 “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.”**

We read where Cornelius was told to be baptized in **Acts 10**. Lydia believed Paul's preaching and was baptized, as well as the Philippian jailer who was told to believe on the Lord, and was baptized the same hour of the night, both in **Acts 16**. The Corinthians in **Acts 18** believed and were baptized as well.

But nowhere was anyone told to simply *accept Jesus into their hearts* to be saved. Someone says, *but isn't that what we're doing when we are saved—accepting the Lord, giving Him entrance into our hearts?* Well, we are *receiving* Jesus. I don't like the term 'accepting' but we are receiving Jesus and His truths; not in the sense that such Ashdodic language implies.

You see, the Bible teaches in **Ephesian 3:17** that Christ dwells in the Christian heart by faith.

**Ephesians 3:17 "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;"**

That occurs when a person submits to Christ and obeys His will. There's not a single word in any of the accounts of the preaching of the gospel where a person was told to *"ask the Lord to come into your heart."* The Lord takes up His abode and reigns within our hearts when we are united with Him in faith, repentance and baptism.

**Romans 6:3-5 "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:"**

If we want to speak the language of the apostles and of the Holy Spirit, we can talk of one believing on the Lord (**Acts 16:31**); of one being baptized into Christ (**Galatians 3:27**); of one obeying the gospel (**Romans 10:16, II Thessalonians 1:7-9**). But *accepting Christ into one's heart*, as though Christ can only be prayed into one's heart and life, is the language of Ashdod and it comes from a very false concept.

We also hear the language of Ashdod when it comes to the church. I suppose the word 'church' is one of the most misunderstood, misused and misapplied words in the Bible. It is used by most people today to refer to a building or a place, or to refer to a manmade denomination or an ecclesiastical organization of some sort, etc. But in the Bible, it is used differently. It's only used two or three different ways in the Bible, but it is used to describe the spiritual relationship of ALL who have been reconciled to God; that is, ALL of all time, the world over, who have obeyed the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The word 'church' comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, which means *the called out*. In this universal sense, it simply means *all people who have been called out of the world and into a new relationship with Christ through faith in and obedience to the gospel*. The word 'church' is not a worldwide organization; it's merely a description of those who have been saved from their sins, and it expresses this unique and exclusive relationship to God through Christ that people obtain when they are forgiven of their sins.

The phrases 'church of Christ' or 'church of God' or 'church of the firstborn' are all New Testament phrases, but they are not formal titles. They are descriptions of all of those who are saved in the Lord.

'Church' also refers to a local assembly of believers.

**Romans 16:16 "The churches of Christ salute you."**

That is not speaking of a human organization. It is merely describing congregations of like faith, throughout the world, who come together in the name of Christ or according to the will, word and authority of Christ, to function as a body of believers, to worship and serve together. The word 'church' never refers to a building, yet we hear folks today talk about "going to church." We nearly all fall into this kind of speech. It's so common that we all nearly catch ourselves saying, *we're going to go to church or you should go to church.*

But we should be careful. It's true that in a sense, the word refers to a local assembly of Christians, but the Bible never uses the term in such a way as to say "go to church." If we want to speak the language of God and not imply a false concept, we should talk about *assembling with the church* or *going to assemble* instead. You might be saying, *that sounds very picky to me, sounds like you're just parsing terms.* Well, there is a very significant implication made when we talk about *going to church.* It's very subtle, yet very serious.

When we speak that way, we are characterizing the church as a building, a place, a tangible entity that we can go participate in and then detach ourselves from. But you see, the church is the people who make it up, and we need to be very careful about the language of Ashdod. Sometimes I hear people talking about "church of Christ doctrine," but the Bible doesn't use that kind of language. There is *the gospel, the doctrine of Christ, the truth,* and every church of Christ is to preach and practice that doctrine, but it's not *church of Christ doctrine.* It's simply *the doctrine of Christ* that the church of Christ happens to believe, preach and practice, as ordered by the Savior.

Then again, we hear the language of Ashdod when it comes to preachers and preaching. Do you ever hear of the preacher being called a "pastor?" That's usually not correct. A *pastor* is the same thing as an *elder, an overseer, a bishop.* All of those terms are really interchangeable. There is a difference between the work of an *elder or pastor* and the work of a preacher, teacher or evangelist. While it's true that an elder/pastor teaches, just because a man teaches, that doesn't make a man an elder/pastor. Not only that, but elders/pastors are always spoken of as a plurality of men in a congregation who are selected or appointed to oversee that particular congregation. Those terms are never used in scripture to refer to a man who simply stands and preaches.

Maybe you've heard people refer to the preacher as "reverend." Again, that's the language of Ashdod. The scriptures never use such language to describe a preacher or any other man. The Lord's name is reverend, the Bible says. That simply means that His name is to be revered.

**Psalm 111:9 "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name."**

But man isn't in that category, and a preacher is a man just like any other in the kingdom of God. He just does a distinct work. So, why do people use such terms to describe preachers? Why call a preacher a reverend? It's because they are speaking the language of Ashdod. They've been influenced, maybe very subtly and unknowingly, by the Catholic doctrine of a priesthood separate from that of all believers, and that of a supposed distinction between the so-called "clergy" and "laity." But the Bible makes no such distinction. Are preachers to be respected? Absolutely, if they preach the truth. They are to be loved and esteemed for their work's sake, but not because they occupy some higher relationship to God. Simply because of the work they do in serving in the kingdom. That doesn't put them any closer to God or on a pedestal of reverence in the church or kingdom.

Next, I often hear brothers and sisters talk about a sermon and they'll say, *so and so "delivered the message."* I hear that one all of the time, but again, if you stop and think about it, that's the language of Ashdod. When the Bible uses the word *message*, it refers to *the truth* that God through the Holy Spirit gave to the apostles to preach to us. Here's an example:

**I John 1:5 "This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."**

When the word *messenger* is used, it often refers to men such as John the Baptist, who came with a specific and unique message given to him by God, to deliver unto the people.

**Luke 7:27 "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."**

You might be thinking, *isn't that what preachers today are doing when they preach a gospel sermon? Doesn't that make them a messenger of the Lord? Aren't they delivering to us His message?* Not exactly, and again, it has some very consequential implications. When a preacher preaches a gospel sermon, he is merely preaching the message already sent and delivered in the word of God. He's not bringing a message to you; he's just pointing you to the message that has already been revealed. He has not been given something new or unique to deliver to you or me. In fact, let me give you a word of warning: if what he is preaching is new or he claims that what he is preaching is a message from the Lord, beware, because it didn't come from God. The faith has already been delivered once and for all to the saints.

**Jude 3 "...exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."**

We leave a dangerous impression with people when we speak the language of Ashdod in regard to this or any other matter. We take away from the finality, authority and sufficiency of the word of God when we imply that preachers today are inspired by the Holy Spirit or when we imply that preachers today receive messages directly from God to deliver to their congregations. The fact is, God has spoken in His word and the faithful gospel preacher who is true to the word of God will only preach what God has already revealed within His word. This is the standard. This is the test. So, I don't have a message to preach to you. Rather, if I am faithful to the gospel, I'm simply going to preach the message which was delivered a long time ago, from God, to the church, through the work of the inspired apostles, who were filled with and guided by the Holy Spirit.

In closing, when we speak the language of Ashdod, we convey ideas that are contrary to the word of God. We need to be careful about the language that we use. If we find ourselves speaking the language of Ashdod, it's usually because we've been mingling with false doctrine and false religion. We are surrounded and bombarded by it today. We hear our friends and neighbors speaking the languages of false religion and we hear preachers on television or radio, or even in pulpits across the land who are preaching false doctrine. If we're not careful to drink from the well of inspired scripture instead of the wells of denominationalism and sectarianism and error, we'll end up speaking a language other than the language of God.

**II Timothy 1:13 "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."**

