

James 3:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

Analysis

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

No man can tame (damasai, δαμάσαι) the tongue; it is a restless evil (akatalēton, ἀκατάλητον) full of deadly poison. Human effort alone fails; the tongue's volatility and toxicity mirror the serpent's venom.

Reformed soteriology points to the need for new hearts. The gospel, not mere self-help, restrains the poison. James magnifies our dependence on grace.

Historical Context

Poison imagery evoked assassinations and slander lawsuits common in Roman provinces. Diaspora Christians knew reputations could be destroyed by venomous words. James warns that the church must not mimic the world."

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What poisonous speech patterns need immediate repentance?

2. How can prayer and Scripture renew your speech?
3. Who has been wounded by your words and needs healing?

Interlinear Text

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|------------------------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|------------------|------------|-------------|
| τὴν | δὲ | γλῶσσαν | οὐδεὶς | δύναται | ἄνθρωπον | δαμάσαι |
| G3588 | But | the tongue | no | can | man | tame |
| | G1161 | G1100 | G3762 | G1410 | G444 | G1150 |
| ἀκατάσχετον | κακόν | μεστὴ | ιοῦ | θανατηφόρου | | |
| it is an unruly | evil | full | poison | of deadly | | |
| G183 | G2556 | G3324 | G2447 | G2287 | | |

Additional Cross-References

Romans 3:13 (Parallel theme): Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Psalms 140:3 (Parallel theme): They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders' poison is under their lips. Selah.

James 3:6 (Parallel theme): 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.

Psalms 55:21 (Parallel theme): The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords.

Psalms 57:4 (Parallel theme): My soul is among lions: and I lie even among them that are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.

Psalms 59:7 (Parallel theme): Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear?

Psalms 58:4 (Parallel theme): Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear;

Ecclesiastes 10:11 (Parallel theme): Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment; and a babbler is no better.

Deuteronomy 32:33 (Parallel theme): Their wine is the poison of dragons, and the cruel venom of asps.

Revelation 12:9 (Evil): And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

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