

Proverbs 16:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire.

Analysis

An ungodly man diggeth up evil: and in his lips there is as a burning fire. Ish beliyya'al koreh ra'ah (אִישׁ בָּלָעֵל כְּרָה בָּעָה, a worthless man digs up evil). Beliyya'al (בָּלָעֵל, worthless, wicked, destructive) describes someone who excavates evil like mining for treasure. Ve'al-sefotav ke'esh tsoreevet (וְעַל־שְׁפָתָיו כְּאֵשׁ צְרָבָת, and on his lips like scorching fire). His speech burns destructively. The proverb warns that wicked people actively seek evil and speak destructively. James 3:6 describes the tongue as fire that sets the whole course of nature ablaze. Believers must guard against destructive speech.

Historical Context

Fire imagery represented uncontrolled destruction in ancient contexts—wildfires, arson, warfare. Malicious speech could destroy reputations, provoke wars, incite violence. Biblical examples include Doeg's slander leading to priests' massacre (1 Samuel 22:9-19), Haman's scheming against Jews (Esther 3), and false witnesses condemning Stephen (Acts 6:11-14). The proverb warned against becoming such destructive people or falling victim to them.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. Are you digging up evil (seeking opportunities to criticize, gossip, slander) or burying it in love (covering offenses)?
2. How is your speech like fire—does it warm and illuminate, or burn and destroy?
3. What safeguards can prevent your tongue from becoming a destructive fire (James 3:5-6)?

Interlinear Text

כִּי אֵשׁ שֶׁ פָתַח יְהוָה וְעַל בְּעֵת הַכְּרִיּוֹת בְּלִיעָל אֵשׁ
man An ungodly diggeth up evil and in his lips fire
H376 H1100 H3738 H7451 H5921 H8193 H784

צְבָתָה:

there is as a burning

H6867

Additional Cross-References

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.

Proverbs 6:14 (Parallel theme): Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord.

Isaiah 5:18 (Parallel theme): Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope:

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.

Proverbs 6:12 (Evil): A naughty person, a wicked man, walketh with a froward mouth.

1 Samuel 25:17 (Evil): Now therefore know and consider what thou wilt do; for evil is determined against our master, and against all his household: for he is such a son of Belial, that a man cannot speak to him.

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