

Proverbs 18:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.

Analysis

This proverb articulates the principle of moral causality: words produce consequences—for good or ill—that affect the speaker himself. 'A man's belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth' uses 'belly' (בָּطֶן/beten, stomach/womb) to represent the whole person—you consume what your speech produces. 'The increase of his lips' (שְׁפָתִים/tevu'at sefatav, harvest/crop of his lips) continues agricultural imagery: speech plants seeds that yield harvests the speaker must 'eat.' This connects to Proverbs 18:21: 'Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.' Words create realities. Wise speech produces blessing, relationships, opportunities, honor. Foolish speech produces conflict, alienation, shame, ruin. Jesus taught this principle: 'For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned' (Matthew 12:37). The speech-fruit metaphor appears throughout Scripture: we will give account for 'every idle word' (Matthew 12:36). James warns that the tongue, though small, steers the whole life (James 3:4-5).

Historical Context

Agricultural societies intimately understood the seed-harvest principle: you reap what you sow. This natural law illustrated spiritual realities throughout Scripture (Galatians 6:7-8). In ancient Israel's oral culture, a person's words determined their social standing, relationships, and livelihood. Teachers, prophets, counselors, judges, kings—all wielded influence primarily through speech. False prophets brought destruction through their words (Jeremiah 23:16-17). True prophets

brought God's life-giving word (Jeremiah 15:16). Scribes and Pharisees were condemned not primarily for actions but for their words—teaching burdens they wouldn't bear (Matthew 23:4), appearing righteous while inwardly corrupt (Matthew 23:28). In the early church, teachers faced stricter judgment because of their words' impact (James 3:1).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What 'fruit' are your words currently producing in your life and relationships?
2. How does understanding that you will 'eat' what your speech produces motivate careful, wise communication?
3. In what areas—social media, workplace, family, church—do you most need to cultivate wise speech?

Interlinear Text

בָּטָן וְיִשְׁבַּע: מִפְרַע יְשִׁיבָה אֵלֶּה פִּי
with the fruit of his mouth A man's shall be satisfied belly
H6529 H6310 H376 H7646 H990

וְיִשְׁבַּע: שְׁפָתָה תְּבֻאֵת
and with the increase of his lips shall be satisfied
H8393 H8193 H7646

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 13:2 (Parallel theme): A man shall eat good by the fruit of his mouth: but the soul of the transgressors shall eat violence.

Proverbs 22:18 (Parallel theme): For it is a pleasant thing if thou keep them within thee; they shall withal be fitted in thy lips.

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