

# Proverbs 18:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.

## Analysis

The Hebrew term 'talebearer' (נִרְגָּן/nirgan) literally means 'whisperer'—one who spreads secrets maliciously. 'As wounds' (כְּמִתְלָהִימִים/kemitlahamim) suggests words that penetrate and infect like physical injuries. The phrase 'go down into the innermost parts of the belly' (יָרַדוּ חֲדָרַי־בָּטֶן/yardu chadrey-baten) indicates deep, lasting damage. Gossip doesn't merely graze the surface—it wounds the core of human dignity and relationships. This proverb exposes gossip's insidious nature: it masquerades as concern or information-sharing while inflicting profound harm. Paul lists 'whisperers' among heinous sins in Romans 1:29-30, placing them alongside murder and covenant-breaking. The New Testament repeatedly condemns such speech (2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Timothy 5:13). Gossip violates the second greatest commandment—love of neighbor—by destroying reputation and trust. It also manifests pride, as the gossip positions himself as judge over others.

## Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern cultures, including Israel, operated on honor-shame dynamics. A person's reputation constituted their social capital—more valuable than material wealth. Gossip could socially destroy someone, rendering them unable to participate in community life. The law of Moses prohibited talebearing: 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people' (Leviticus 19:16). This command immediately preceded the prohibition against hatred and the command to love one's neighbor—revealing gossip's connection to malice and violation of love. In the early church, gossip threatened community unity. James

devoted extensive attention to the tongue's destructive power (James 3:1-12), warning believers that uncontrolled speech contradicts faith.

## Related Passages

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**Romans 2:1** — Judging others

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. Do you find yourself drawn to hearing or spreading information about others that serves no redemptive purpose?
2. How can you distinguish between appropriate sharing of concerns (Matthew 18:15-17) and sinful gossip?
3. What would change in your relationships if you treated others' reputations as sacred trusts rather than entertainment?

## Interlinear Text

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דְּבַר י	נִרְגָּן	כְּמַתְּלֵהֶם יָם	וְהֵם יֵרֵדוּ	
The words	of a talebearer	are as wounds	H1992	and they go down
H1697	H5372	H3859		H3381
מִדָּרְי	בֶּטֶן:			
into the innermost parts	of the belly			
H2315	H990			

## Additional Cross-References

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**Proverbs 16:28** (Parallel theme): A froward man soweth strife: and a whisperer separateth chief friends.

**Proverbs 12:18** (Word): There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health.

**Leviticus 19:16** (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour: I am the LORD.

**Psalms 52:2** (Parallel theme): Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

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