

Psalms 141:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.

Analysis

"Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." The petition shitah YHWH shomerah l'phi (set, O LORD, a guard for my mouth) asks for divine help controlling speech. Shomerah (guard/watchman) indicates sentinel protecting against invasion. Peh (mouth) encompasses all speech. Nitzrah al dal sefatai (keep watch over the door of my lips). Natsar (keep/guard/preserve); delet (door); sapah (lip). The double image—guard before mouth, door over lips—emphasizes desperate need for restraint. James 3:2-12 elaborates on the tongue's power and difficulty in taming it. David knew his own vulnerability to sinful speech and called on God to control what he himself couldn't fully govern.

Historical Context

David's life included speech failures: rash vow regarding Nabal (1 Samuel 25), numbering Israel pridefully (2 Samuel 24), inadequate response to Amnon's sin (2 Samuel 13). Other biblical figures struggled with speech: Moses struck rock in anger rather than speaking to it (Numbers 20:10-12), Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75), Paul had sharp contention with Barnabas (Acts 15:39). Proverbs extensively addresses speech: guarding lips preserves life (Proverbs 13:3), many words increase sin (Proverbs 10:19), pleasant words are like honeycomb (Proverbs 16:24). Jesus warned that every idle word will face judgment (Matthew 12:36-37).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. What specific areas of speech (gossip, criticism, lying, vulgarity, etc.) require God's guarding in your life?
2. How can believers practically "set a guard" before their mouths in daily interactions?
3. What is the relationship between heart condition and speech patterns (Matthew 12:34, Luke 6:45)?

Interlinear Text

שִׁמְרָה	לְפָנֶיךָ	עַל	דַּלְלָה
Set	O LORD	a watch	the door
H7896	H3068	H8108	H1817

שִׁפְתִּים

of my lips

H8193

Additional Cross-References

James 1:26 (Parallel theme): If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

Psalms 39:1 (Parallel theme): I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.

Micah 7:5 (Parallel theme): Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide: keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom.

James 3:2 (Parallel theme): For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

Psalms 34:13 (Parallel theme): Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

Psalms 71:8 (Parallel theme): Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour all the day.

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