

Romans 3:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips:

Analysis

Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips. Paul shifts from general indictment to specific sins, beginning with speech (vv. 13-14). From Psalm 5:9 and 140:3, the imagery is grotesque. *Taphos aneōgmenos ho larynx autōn* (τάφος ἀνεῳγμένος ὁ λάρυγξ αὐτῶν, "their throat is an opened grave")—what emerges from human mouths is the stench of death and corruption.

Tais glōssais autōn edolioung (ταῖς γλώσσαις αὐτῶν ἐδολιοῦσαν, "with their tongues they kept deceiving")—continuous deception. *Ios aspidōn* (ἰὸς ἀσπίδων, "venom of asps") depicts words as lethal poison. James 3:8 echoes this: "the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." Human speech, which should glorify God, instead spreads corruption, falsehood, and spiritual death. The throat-tongue-lips sequence emphasizes that evil proceeds from humanity's core.

Historical Context

Ancient Judaism highly valued truthful speech as reflecting God's character. The Psalms Paul quotes were originally about Israel's enemies. By applying them to all humanity, Paul argues that Jews stand under the same condemnation. The asp (cobra) was particularly feared in the Mediterranean world for its deadly venom.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does this sobering imagery challenge your view of "small" sins like gossip, flattery, or white lies?
2. In what ways does your speech spread corruption rather than life (Ephesians 4:29)?
3. What does it mean that even your words, apart from grace, are instruments of death?

Interlinear Text

τάφος	άνεῳγμένος	ό	λάρυγξ	αὐτῶν·	ταῖς	γλώσσαις
sepulchre	is an open		throat	Their		tongues
G5028	G455	G3588	G2995	G846	G3588	G1100

αὐτῶν·	ἐδολιοῦσαν	ἰὸς	ἀσπίδων	ὑπὸ	τὰ	χείλη
Their	they have used deceit	the poison	of asps	is under	G3588	lips
G846	G1387	G2447	G785	G5259		G5491

αὐτῶν·

Their
G846

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 5:9 (Parallel theme): For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue.

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

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.

Isaiah 59:3 (Parallel theme): For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your lips have spoken lies, your tongue hath muttered perverseness.

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

Ezekiel 13:7 (Parallel theme): Have ye not seen a vain vision, and have ye not spoken a lying divination, whereas ye say, The LORD saith it; albeit I have not spoken?

Psalms 36:3 (Parallel theme): The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good.

Jeremiah 5:16 (Parallel theme): Their quiver is as an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men.

Romans 3:4 (Parallel theme): God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

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