

## Taming the Terrible Tongue Pt.2

### James 3:1–12

James 3:1–12 (NKJV)

**3** My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. <sup>2</sup> For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. <sup>3</sup> Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. <sup>4</sup> Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. <sup>5</sup> Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

See how great a forest a little fire kindles! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. <sup>8</sup> But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be

so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

## Introduction

James has very little to say about the tongue that is positive in this passage. We might say that at least he says you can “Bless the God and Father” with it. Other than that, he is pretty graphic about the evil nature of the tongue.

But the more I read the words of James in this chapter, I thought there might be one more positive thing he says about the tongue. In verse 5, he says that it is little.

How wonderful is that!! With the power and evil and destruction this little thing can cause. Oh to wonder what it would be like if it were big.

It reminded me of the story I read of a pastor who had a lady in his church who was a malicious gossip and caused him an untold amount of heartache, strife and division in his church. But one Sunday after there service, the lady came to the pastor to tell him that she had been convicted by the message he preached about the use of her tongue and that she

had come to lay her tongue on the altar. But she noticed the pastor seemed to be in disbelief, so she asked if he believed her. The pastor said yes, and that he believed her, but he was concerned that the altar might not be big enough.

Well James reminds us that it is small but is very big in its destructive power!

Some of us have seen first hand the destructive power of the tongue whether it be in a church, or job or your extended family for your own immediate family. I've seen husband's and wives divorce over words.. I've seen parent and child relationships destroyed by words. I've seen children provoked to anger rebellion from the words of a father.

When I was a boy and a young teen I got a full dose of what it's like to have a father provoke his child to anger. My best friend then was Ray. He and I grew up together, played together as boys in Florida would do. Riding bikes, swimming in the creek, catching crap and shrimp, climbing trees, building tree huts etc. We would often spend the night together at each others home. Sometimes mine but more often his. His dad was exceptional harsh with him verbally and his step mother was even worse. Always yelling at him, telling him he was worthless and could never do anything right. Slicing at his very soul with these words. It was truly

horrifying. I never forgot it. Not only how it made me feel but even more what it did to Ray. I lost contact with Ray after highschool, with me being called into ministry and meeting Angela, Ray and I parted ways and I never heard from him again, until one day, a couple of years ago, I did a internet search for him to see if I could find him and maybe talk to him. Well I found him. It was a prison picture detailing his death in prison to be buried in a prison grave yard in 2017.... What would have been different had his father and stepmother spoke words of love and encouragement and built him up rather than continual tearing him down and dismantling his potential as human being. What a tragic result of the tongue destroying a man.

I've seen entire churches divided and ministry decimated by gossip, slander and characterizations by words.

Entire ministries and lives of believers have been destroys by words that were never said but spread as if they had been.

But that was history, that's in our past...right. Well, not quite. Unless all of us have had our tongue removed, the potential of death and destruction remains.

But even more so today. Today there is an new means of sinning with the tongue. It's the new

Digital Tongue. It looks different but is very powerful. Instead of the wet, and warm bump filled wiggly little muscle lying behind your teeth, this tongue is flat, with glass laid over one side and you can touch it and it lights up....

It's amazing. With it I can talk to someone in the other room or on the other side of the world. I can take pictures with it and even make movies with it. It can hold billions of bits of information and allow me to access all the information I would ever want to read and study in a life time.

It also can send these things called text.... Amazing short communications to remind you of all the things you didn't want to remember or to tell you something important about a friend in the hospital or send a quick note of encouragement.

Along with this ability, this new digital tongue can email and post things on social media and you can talk to people you have never met.

But this new digital tongue had a dark side, a very dark side. It can be very evil, and malicious and full of gossip and slander.

"....online harassment have increased ever since the invention of the smartphone. The Pew Research Center conducted a study that stated at least "one in three online teens have experienced online

harassment.” Many U.S. states have made laws to regulate this growing problem.

Harsh words, hurt emotions, and damaged reputations fill our social media feeds every waking morning.

Tony Reinke in his book *12 Ways Your Phone is Changing You* puts the problem this way:

In an age when anyone with a smartphone can publish dirt on anyone else, we must know that spreading antagonistic messages online, with the intent of provoking hostility without any desire for resolution, is what the world calls ‘trolling’ and what the New Testament calls ‘slander’. (166)

The sad reality is that some Christians have been guilty of “trolling” and fail to recognize its destructive effects. Reinke explains how easy it is for us to engage in this particular sin:

Each of us have an inner troll, an inner slanderer—some part of us that would love to text some dirt to a friend, publish dirt online, and anonymously consume that dirt online. (169)

Slander, gossip, half-truths (what the world calls “alternative facts”), lying, critical speech, insult,

sarcasm, and ridicule could all be labeled “trolling.” Corrupt talk should not come out of our mouths”.  
....even our digital mouths

Believers are expected and commanded to have gracious and clean mouths. In our world its very easy to stand out as brilliant light. Just never say anything bad about anyone but always speak what is gracious and loving and edifying.

Ephesians 4:29 (NKJV)

<sup>29</sup> Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

Ephesians 5:3–4 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; <sup>4</sup> neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.

Colossians 3:8–9 (NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out

of your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

Colossians 4:6 (NKJV)

<sup>6</sup> *Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*

## Review

### I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

**1** My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

### II. The Potential Perfection by the Tongue

**2** For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he *is* a **perfect** man, able also to bridle the whole body.



I. The Pressing Prudence Regarding the Tongue

II. The Potential Perfection by the Tongue

**III. The Pervasive Power of the Tongue.**

**3** Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body.

**4** Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.

**5** Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.

## **Lesson**

I. The Destructive Inferno of the Tongue

II. The Deadly Depiction of the Tongue.

III. The Defining Nature of the Tongue

## I. The Destructive Inferno of the Tongue

5b. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

James continues the contrast between small and great with now more of an emphasis on the destructive and disastrous results the tongue and bring. The tongue might be small, but it can destroy vast areas. It is the equivalent of the Atomic bomb that has very small particles but great explosive power to destroy.

**5b.** See how great a forest a little fire kindles!

On October 8, 1871, at about eight-thirty in the evening, a lantern in Mrs. O'Leary's barn, presumably kicked over by her cow, ignited the great Chicago fire. Before it could be contained, 17,500 buildings were destroyed, 300 people died, and

125,000 others were left homeless. In 1903, a pan of rice boiled over onto a fire, spreading coals across the room and starting a blaze that eventually consumed a square mile of a Korean city, burning some three thousand buildings to the ground.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 155). Moody Press.

The largest fire in California's history was the Ranch fire. It started

“in late July of 2018 north of the community of Upper Lake and burned 410,203 acres in Colusa, Glenn, Lake and Mendocino counties, CAL FIRE said. The blaze destroyed 280 structures and resulted in one firefighter death and three firefighter injuries.”

The investigation concluded that the fire “was caused by a spark or hot metal fragment that came from a hammer driving a metal stake into the ground, according to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.” <https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/07/us/ranch-fire-caused-by-spark/index.html>

**5b.** See how great a **forest** a little fire kindles!

Although the verb *eidon* literally means simply to **see**, the imperative mood and middle voice used

here (*idou*) almost give it the force of a command. Consequently, this form is often rendered “behold,” especially in dramatic narratives, in order to call special attention to what is about to be said or about to happen (see, e.g., Matt. 1:20, 23; 25:6; John 4:35; Rev. 1:7, 18; 22:7, 12). The idea is, “Pay close attention.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 154). Moody Press.

The Greek adjective *hēlikos* calls attention to the size of a thing and can mean “very large” or “very small” — “immensity or minuteness.” The context must make clear the distinction.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 193). BMH Books.

## forest

**5208.** ὕλη *húlē*; gen. *húlēs*, fem. noun. The basic material or matter of which all things are formed, especially wood, the forest. In the NT, wood, firewood, fuel (James 3:5).

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

Elliott-Binns maintains that in view of the Palestinian origin of this book, it would be more accurate to think not of a forest of towering trees but of the uncultivated brushwood or scrub characteristic of much of the country. “With the setting of a hillside

covered with dry brush or wood, such an environment is literally a tinderbox just waiting to explode at the slightest spark.”<sup>39</sup> Bishop points to how quickly brush fires spread in the Palestinian dry season.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 193). BMH Books.

The verb “set on fire,” rather than “consumed,” points to the setting of the fire; it is so devastating because it is not controlled. An uncontrolled tongue can initiate forces and movements that are just as destructive.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 193). BMH Books.

Here, the Forest could represent the fallen nature of Humanity, dead, and dry, a tinderbox kindling, ready with one hot word from an evil tongue to explode into a consuming fire.

A fire under control can bring great blessing and benefit. It can warm a home in winter, it can cook a meal for a family and it can bring light to a dark room. But fire out of control can burn that same home down, it can kill and destroy the ones a living there and bring great devastation and death and darkness.

The saintly Robert Murray M'Cheyne was surely nearer the mark when he resolved that when a fellow Christian's name was mentioned in company, if he could not say anything good about him, he would refrain from all speech about him. Better that, surely, than to be careless with fire and "destroy a brother for whom Christ died" (Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:11).

This is the reasoning of James.....

**6** And the tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity.

The tongue is not only powerful; it is also perverse. It is small and influential but, worse by far, it can be satanic and infectious

Blue, J. R. (1985). [James](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 827). Victor Books.

### Proverbs 16:27 (NKJV)

<sup>27</sup> An ungodly man digs up evil,  
And *it is* on his lips like a burning fire.

### Proverbs 26:20–22 (LSB)

<sup>20</sup> With no wood the fire goes out,  
And where there is no whisperer, strife quiets down.

<sup>21</sup> *Like* charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire,

22 So is a contentious man to kindle strife.  
 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels,  
 And they go down into the innermost parts of the stomach.

So, James in a passionate filled string of pictures describes the tongue in 5 different ways and none of them are good.

**6** And the tongue *is* a **fire**, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

**1. Fire**—- all consuming, destructive, and very painful.

**Fire** has the amazing and virtually unique capacity to reproduce itself in an almost unlimited way as long as it has fuel to burn. Like the vast majority of things, water cannot multiply. When it is poured out, no matter where or on what, it never expands into a flood. But **fire** feeds on itself. If there is sufficient

flammable material and enough oxygen to sustain combustion, it will burn on indefinitely.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (pp. 154–155). Moody Press.

## 2. a world of iniquity — i.e. unrighteousness.

**ἀδικία *adikía***; gen. *adikías*, fem. noun from *ádikos* (94), unjust. Injustice.

**(A)** Generally as in Luke 18:6, the unjust judge or literally the judge of injustice, meaning the judge to whom people accused of injustice are brought. The character of this judge is detailed in Luke 18:2 as one who did not fear God nor regard man. In Rom. 9:14, an axiomatic statement is made concerning God that there is no unrighteousness with Him, which means that He cannot treat anyone unjustly (Sept.: Deut. 32:4).

**(B)** Wrong or injury as done to others (2 Cor. 12:13; Sept.: Ps. 7:3; Mic. 3:10).

**(II)** As related to *dikaíosúnē* (1343), righteousness which is often used of life and conduct. Thus *adikía* takes by antithesis the sense of impropriety, iniquity, unrighteousness, wickedness (Luke 13:27, “the workers of iniquity,” meaning wicked men; Acts 1:18; Rom. 1:29; 3:5; 6:13; 2 Tim. 2:19; Heb. 8:12; 2 Pet. 2:13; 1 John 5:17). In James 3:6, “a world of iniquity,” means that the tongue is capable of all kinds of wickedness. (See also Sept.: Gen. 6:11, 13; 1 Sam. 3:13, 14; Ps. 11:5; Zech. 3:9).

**(III)** Fraud, deceit, guile (John 7:18).

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

(*ho kosmos tēs adikias*). The use of the article with both nouns stresses its distinctive character as such.



The term “world” has a root meaning of adorning or adornment; it is used of a woman’s attire in 1 Peter 3:3. It is commonly used to denote the world or universe, viewed as an orderly system. Thus James stamps the tongue as a vast system or organism connected with “evil,” that which is unjust and unrighteous in character. The genitive “of evil” may mean a world “composed of evil” (genitive of substance) or “characterized by evil” (genitive of quality). In this epistle the term “world” always has a bad sense

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 194). BMH Books.

The Tongue is an organized system of words lined up in such a fashion as to be adorned with the worst forms of evil. Not unorganized but rather specifically set in motion like the planets of the cosmos to reap the best benefit for the evil of the heart. A systematic sequence of words that can inflict the most damage an harm.

the context it seems best to accept that James thinks of the tongue as a vast system of iniquity. The use of the definite article with both nouns in this expression makes it specific; the tongue is verily “*the* world of evil,” for it embodies in itself the essence of all wickedness.

Since the tongue can play a part in all the sins in the world, it incorporates in itself the whole story of evil in this world.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 195). BMH Books.

Some years ago, Morgan Blake, a sportswriter for the *Atlanta Journal*, wrote the following satire:

I am more deadly than the screaming shell from the howitzer. I win without killing. I tear down homes, break hearts, and wreck lives. I travel on the wings of the wind. No innocence is strong enough to intimidate me, no purity pure enough to daunt me. I have no regard for truth, no respect for justice, no mercy for the defenseless. My victims are as numerous as the sands of the sea, and often as innocent. I never forget and seldom forgive. My name is Gossip. (Cited in George Sweeting, *Faith That Works* [Chicago: Moody, 1983], 76–77)

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 155). Moody Press.

**3.set among our members that it  
defiles the whole body,**

**defiles --Pres. A. Part.**

**4695. σπιλόω *spilóō***; contracted *spilō*, fut. *spilōsō*, from *spílos* (4696), a spot, stain. To defile, spot, stain (James 3:6; Jude 1:23).

**Syn.:** *rhupóō* (4510), to soil, become dirty; *bebēlóō* (953), to desecrate; *hierosuléō* (2416), to commit sacrilege; *molúnō* (3435), to soil, defile; *miáinō* (3392), to defile.

**Ant.:** *kathaírō* (2508), to cleanse; *katharízō* (2511), to cleanse, purge; *hagnízō* (48), to purify.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

The present active articular participle, “the defiler of the whole body,” depicts the progressive moral impact that it produces

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 195). BMH Books.

No other member of our physical body has comparable power and range of influence for evil

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 195). BMH Books.

Here the word “body” properly denotes the whole personality, since the person resides in the body and uses his body as his instrument

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 196). BMH Books.

Mark 7:20–23 (NKJV)

<sup>20</sup> And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>22</sup> thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Just like the heart is the source of all evil, the tongue can give voice to the evil thoughts, wickedness, blasphemy and pride and all kinds of foolishness.

It can pave the way for illicit relationships of adultery and fornication.

The tongue can lie to cover sin, It can misrepresent the truth to keep a position. It can boast of things that aren't facts. It can talk a person into committing crimes. It can say its ok to kill. The Tongue is a limitless source and vocal platform for evil and the encouragement of it.

#### **4. sets on fire the course of nature;**

James 3:6 (LSB)

6 and sets on fire the course of *our* existence,

“sets the whole course of his life on fire,

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 196). BMH Books.

(lit., “the wheel of existence” or “wheel of birth,” *ton trochon tēs geneseōs*). It is as though the tongue is at the center or hub of the wheel of nature and, like a fireworks display, the wheel is **set on fire** at the center. The more it burns, the faster it revolves until the whole wheel spins in a blaze, spitting fire in all directions

Blue, J. R. (1985). [James](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 828). Victor Books.

Some suggest that James is thinking of life as represented by a wheel that is set in motion at birth and continues rolling until death. Or it is thought to picture daily life as a wheel, life with its continuous recurrence of daily affairs. Some would elaborate the picture to mean that the tongue is the axle of this wheel and that as a fire it set the whole wheel aflame

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 196). BMH Books.

To a large extent, we are known by the way we talk. Over the long haul, what we say gives others a pretty good idea of who and what we really are. That

principle applies to good things as well as sinful, but James's emphasis here is entirely on the negative aspects of our speaking—such as gossip, slander, false accusations, lying, filthy language and stories, and other sins of the tongue—that can destroy individual lives, families, schools, churches, and communities.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 156). Moody Press.

### 5.and it is set on fire by hell.

Fourth, and most horribly, the sinful tongue **is set on fire by hell**. The present active form of the verb *phlogizō* (**is set on fire**) indicates a continuing state. That idea is reinforced by the term James uses for **hell**. Except for its use here, *gehenna* (**hell**) is not found in the New Testament outside of the synoptic gospels, where, in each case, it is used by Jesus. The word literally means “valley of Hinnom,” a deep gorge southwest of Jerusalem, where trash, garbage, and the bodies of dead animals and executed criminals were dumped and continually burned. The location had originally been used by Canaanite and even some Israelite worshipers to sacrifice their children as burnt offerings to the

pagan god Molech. When that heinous practice was permanently halted by the godly King Josiah of Judah (see 2 Kings 23:10), the place was considered to be unclean and wholly unfit for any decent usage.

It therefore came to be used as a garbage dump, where all the filth of the city of Jerusalem and surrounding areas was taken to be burned. Because the fire burned all the time and maggots were always present, the Lord used *gehenna* to represent the eternal, never-ending torment of **hell**, “the unquenchable fire, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43–44; cf. Isa. 66:24; Matt. 5:22). **Hell** is Satan’s place, prepared for him and his demons (Matt. 25:41). As such, it is used here as a synonym for Satan and the demons.

That it is said to be **set on fire by hell** indicates that the tongue can be Satan’s tool, fulfilling hell’s purposes to pollute, corrupt, and destroy. It is unbelievably dangerous and destructive. Using another figure of death and destruction, the psalmist says of those who misuse their tongues, “His speech was smoother than butter, but his heart was war; his words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords” (Ps. 55:21); “Behold, they belch forth with their mouth; swords are in their lips” (59:7); and as those “who have sharpened their tongue like a

sword. They aimed bitter speech as their arrow” (64:3).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 157). Moody Press.

## I. The Destructive Inferno of the Tongue

## II. The Deadly Depiction of the Tongue.

**7** For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind.

The wildest, smartest, fastest, most powerful, and most elusive of creatures are subject to man’s taming.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 158). Moody Press.

The worst of animal kingdom all from the largest to the smallest with venom that can kill is under the dominion.

“Tamed” need not imply domestication. The verb here used is stronger than “tamed” and means “to subdue, curb, subjugate,” to bring under control for one’s purpose. Elsewhere in the New Testament it



occurs only in Mark 5:4, of the Gerasene demoniac who could not be controlled. Many wild creatures have been subdued by man without being domesticated to the extent that the restraining leash imposed upon them might be safely removed.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, pp. 198–199). BMH Books.

The double use of the term “tamed,” in the present and the perfect tenses, calls forth the evidence from observation and history. The present tense pictures human nature’s domination of animal nature as a fact repeatedly being observed. As Kistemaker remarks, “We see this displayed in a circus performance where wild animals obey their trainer who merely cracks a whip, snaps his fingers, or claps his hands.” The use of the perfect tense “have been tamed” adds that history is replete with such examples. This amazing ability of man is nothing new; it is part of God’s original purpose for man (Gen. 1:26; 9:2; Ps. 8:6–8). It is standing proof of the inherent superiority of human nature over animal nature

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 199). BMH Books.

**8** But no man can tame the tongue. *It is* an **unruly evil** , full of **deadly poison**.

“But” introduces the sad contrast “but no man can tame the tongue.” The present tense “can” (*dunatai*), “is able,” declares man’s standing inability “to tame” (aorist tense) his tongue as an effective achievement. “Because of the fall,” Tasker remarks, “man has lost dominion over himself.” “The tongue,” placed emphatically forward, marks the human tongue as “the one-of-a-kind creature; namely, *untamable!*” “No one” (*oudeis*), which leaves no exceptions, is limited by the genitive “of men” (*anthrōpōn*), which stands emphatically at the end of the statement. “This inability is purely moral, due simply to a weakness of will.” But what is hopeless for fallen man can become a reality by God’s grace and power

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 199). BMH Books.

Even in believers, **the tongue** can easily slip out of its sanctified cage, as it were, and do great harm. Its

work can be so subtle that it sometimes escapes notice until the damage is done. Well aware of that danger, David prayed, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).  
MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 158). Moody Press.

The rendering “an unruly evil” (KJV) is based on a variant reading (*akatascheton*), “uncontrollable, that cannot be restrained.” But this reading is not strongly attested and adds nothing to the total picture

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 200). BMH Books.

**unruly 182.** ἀκατάστατος *akatástatos*; gen. *akatastátou*, masc.–fem., neut. *akatástaton*, adj. from the priv. *a* (1), not, and *kathístēmi* (2525), to settle. Unsettled, unsteady, unstable (James 1:8).

**Deriv.:** *akatastasia* (181), instability.

**Syn.:** *akatáschetos* (183), one that cannot be restrained; *astérikτος* (793), unstable; *átaktos* (813), insubordinate, unruly.

**Ant.:** *kósmios* (2887), decent, modest, orderly; *taktós* (5002), arranged, set; *euschēmōn* (2158), honorable, comely

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

The adjective “restless” (*akatastaton*), which was rendered “unstable” in 1:8,

## James 1:8(NKJV)

<sup>8</sup> he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

characterizes the tongue as being fickle and inconstant; it cannot be trusted to stay submissively in its proper place. It is notoriously unreliable, constantly prone to break out in vicious words

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 199). BMH Books.

The adjective suggests the picture of “some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down its den.” The nature of this restless tongue is “evil” (*kakos*), base, and degraded in character, and prone to be injurious.

Hiebert, D. E. (1997). [James](#) (Revised Edition, p. 199). BMH Books.

**deadly poison. 2287. θανατηφόρος**  
***thanatēphoros***; gen. *thanatēphórou*, masc.–fem., neut. *thanatēphóron*, adj. from *thánatos* (2288), death, and *phérō* (5342), to bring. Deadly death–bringing (James 3:8; Sept.: Num. 18:22).

**Syn.:** *thanásimos* (2286), deadly, poisonous.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

**poison. 2447. ἰός *íos***; gen. *ioú*, masc. noun from *híēmi* (n.f., see below), to send. Something sent out, emitted, hence venom that serpents eject from their fangs (Rom. 3:13 quoted from Ps. 140:3; James 3:8); rust as being emitted or formed on metals (James 5:3; Sept.: Ezek. 24:6).

**Deriv.** of *híēmi* (n.f.): *aníēmi* (447), to send up, to loosen; *aphíēmi* (863), to send, dismiss; *kathíēmi* (2524)

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

Psalm 55:21 (NKJV)

<sup>21</sup> *The words* of his mouth were smoother than butter,  
But war *was* in his heart;  
His words were softer than oil,  
Yet they *were* drawn swords.

Psalm 140:3 (NKJV)

<sup>3</sup> They sharpen their tongues like a serpent;  
The poison of asps *is* under their lips.

Selah

Ecclesiastes 10:11 (NKJV)

<sup>11</sup> A serpent may bite when *it is* not charmed;  
The babbler is no different.

I. The Destructive Inferno of the Tongue

II. The Deadly Depiction of the Tongue.

### III. The Defining Nature of the Tongue

<sup>9</sup> With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God. <sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. <sup>11</sup> Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

The tongue, as I told you last week is a tattletale on the heart of man. It will betray what is really deep within. It is a fruit of our character, a manifestation of our salvation or the lack of regeneration. You want to know what a man or woman is.... listen to their tongue.

The tongue is not just wild and raging like an animal, but clever, plotting, and subtly deceptive. It is

hypocritical and duplicitous, eagerly willing to deceive in order to achieve its own advantage.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 160). Moody Press.

9 With it we bless our God and  
Father,

The “we” here could be an inclusive we as we the Jews, or we as believers

The Jews to whom James wrote were accustomed to pronouncing blessings on God at the end of each of the eighteen eulogies, or benedictions, they prayed three times a day, saying, “Blessed be Thou, O God.”

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 160). Moody Press.

9 With it we bless our God and  
Father, and with it we **curse** men, who  
have been made in the similitude of  
God.

It is tragically hypocritical to bless God and then with the same tongue that just uttered praise to God to then curse the men who are the creation of God and are only ones of His creation that are in his likeness.

. ὁμοίωσις *homoíōsis*; gen. *homoióseōs*, fem. noun from *homoióō* (3666), to make like. Likeness, resemblance. The only instance in the NT of this is James 3:9 (in allusion to Gen. 1:26; Sept.: Ezek. 1:10; Dan. 10:16) where man is said to bear God's likeness. Although theologians continue to debate about the precise nature of the *imago Dei* in man, variously defining it as ontological, sociological, functional or moral, one thing is certain from this passage, namely, that even fallen man retains some semblance (however badly marred by sin) of the divine impress given him at the original creation.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

### **curse**

doesn't mean to say a bad word, curse in the sense of to Cuss but rather .... wish ruin or harm.



**2672. καταράομαι *kataráomai***; contracted *katarōmai*, fut. *katarásomai*, mid. deponent from *aráomai* (n.f.), to wish something to happen. To wish anyone evil or ruin, to curse, to give one over to ruin (Matt. 5:44 [TR]; Mark 11:21; Luke 6:28; Rom. 12:14; James 3:9; Sept.: Gen. 12:3; Num. 24:9). In the perf. pass., to be cursed (Matt. 25:41).

**Syn.:** *anathematízō* (332), to declare *anáthema* (331), accursed, devoted to destruction, to curse; *katanathematízō* (2653), to utter curses against; *kakologéō* (2551), to speak evil; *katalaléō* (2635), to speak against.

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

Yet every believer has been guilty of that hypocrisy to some extent. It was not only the wicked scribes and Pharisees who claimed to bless God and yet demanded the crucifixion of His Son, accusing Him of blasphemy. Peter confessed that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16); but while his Lord was on trial before the high priest, “he began to curse and swear, ‘I do not know the man!’ And immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word which Jesus had said, ‘Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly” (Matt. 26:74–75). On

one occasion, even the apostle Paul's tongue slipped and he called the high priest a "whitewashed wall" (Acts 23:3). Even though he did not realize he was speaking to the high priest (v. 5), he uttered words that are not fitting in the mouth of a servant of God.

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 160). Moody Press.

We all have stumbled and sinned with our tongue but that is no excuse to permit it. We have been guilty of singing praise on Sunday morning only to slander our brother on Monday. We have prayed prayers on the Lord's day only to talk to others about a brother's sin instead of going to him alone to reconcile with him as Matt 18 commands. We have talked of the great forgiveness of God for our sins only to keep bringing up over and over the sins of others. We have talked of our love for God on Sunday only to be hateful with our words on Monday. We have blessed God for reconciling us to himself on Sunday while on Monday refusing to reconcile with our husband or wife, friend or co worker. We thank God for making us part of the universal body of Christ on Sunday while on Monday we complain about our local Church God led us too.

Lest you think this passage has no application to us brethren, Be NOT Deceived

**10** Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so

ἐκ τοῦ αὐτοῦ στόματος ἐξέρχεται εὐλογία καὶ κατάρα. οὐ χρή, ἀδελφοί μου, ταῦτα οὕτως γίνεσθαι.

**5534. χρή *chrē***; an impersonal verb from *chreía* (5532), need, necessity. It is necessary, it needs to be, ought to be; translated “it is becoming” or “it is appropriate” (James 3:10 with the neg. *ου* [3756], not).

Zodhiates, S. (2000). In [The complete word study dictionary: New Testament](#) (electronic ed.). AMG Publishers.

*Ou chrē* (**ought not**) is a strong negative, used only here in the New Testament. The idea is that there should be no place in a Christian’s life for duplicitous speech. It is an unacceptable and intolerable compromise of righteous, holy living. When God transformed us, He gave us the capacity for new, redeemed, holy speech, and He expects us, as His

children, to speak only that which is holy and right. Our “yes” and “no” should be honest (Matt. 5:37).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 161). Moody Press.

**11** Does a spring send forth fresh *water* and bitter from the same opening?

**12** Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh.

James explains this truth using three illustrations. First, he asks rhetorically, **Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?** The obvious answer is no. The same spring, or fountain, does not issue two vastly different kinds of **water**.

Doubtless alluding to the Lord’s words—“Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?” (Matt. 7:16)—James asks, **Can a fig tree, my brethren, produce olives, or a vine produce figs?** Again, the obvious and expected answer is no. Such a thing is utterly contrary to nature and cannot happen. He then states

emphatically, **Nor can salt water produce fresh.** This also is clearly impossible, and no rational person would think twice about believing anything to the contrary.

A hateful heart cannot produce loving words or works. An unrighteous heart cannot produce righteous words or works. “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit,” Jesus explained, “nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.... So then, you will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:18, 20).

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1998). [James](#) (p. 161). Moody Press.

If you claim to be a fig tree but you bear olives, something's not right. What you say you are is not what you are. You are a olive tree claiming to be a fig tree.

If you claim to be a grapevine, but you bear figs, something's not right. What you say are is not what you are. You are a fig tree that claims to be a grapevine.

And if you claim to be a fresh water spring but only salt water come out of you, something's wrong. You are a salt water spring claiming to be fresh.

Your tongue has betrayed what you really are!!

On the frigid night of December 18th, 1722, the teenager dipped his quill in the ink jar and began to write. He probably cupped his hands toward the warm lantern for a moment first, just to make his fingers more agile in the chilly air. Then he began to compose. Jonathan Edwards was just 74 days past his nineteenth birthday when he wrote the first batch of his famous resolutions.<sup>1</sup>

The young Jonathan Edwards penned a number of his *Resolutions* around this theme. They are worth noting:

1. *Resolved*, Never to say anything at all against anybody, but when it is perfectly agreeable to the highest degree of Christian honor, and of love to mankind, agreeable to the lowest humility, and sense of my own faults and failings, and agreeable to the golden rule; often, when I have said anything against any one, to bring it to, and try it strictly by, the test of this Resolution.
2. *Resolved*, In narrations never to speak anything but the pure and simple verity.
3. *Resolved*, Never to speak evil of any, except I have some particular good call to it.
4. Let there be something of benevolence in all that I speak. (Cited from Sereno E. Dwight's *Memoirs of Jonathan Edwards in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 1834 [reprinted by Banner of Truth, 1974], 1:xxi-xxii)

How easily the failure to master the tongue can destroy the effect of every grace that had taken years to build into our lives! Introduce poison here and we endanger everything. <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-tongue-the-bridle-and-the-blessing-an-exposition-of-james-3-1-12>

