

WORKING OUR WAY THROUGH JAMES' TREATISE ON HUMAN SPEECH, ~ 3:1-12.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, ~ JAMES DEALS WITH ~ The power of the tongue ~ and its control.

▶▶ The Bible has much to say ~ concerning the power of speech ~ for good or evil.

▷▷ And this mini-essay by James ~ is the classic exposition ~ of the problem of controlling the human tongue.

AS NOTED, ~ WHAT JAMES IS DOING IN THE STRUCTURE OF THIS MINI-ESSAY ~ IS moving ~ from the specific ~ to the general.

▶▶ Starts out ~ with an exhortation to teachers regarding speech. ⇔⇔ The specific.

▶▶ Then in 2ff, ~ transitions to the general, ~ instructing all believers regarding speech.

NOW, I HAD SAID THAT ~ AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF TEACHERS, ~ James will not be referring to how our speech affects others.

▶▶ But how it affects the individual who is speaking.

▶▶ Modified thinking.

▷▷ How our speech affects the individual who is speaking ~~ Vv 3-6.

▷▷ Vs 8b ~ brutally realistic description of the tongue ~ and points ~

↪↪ to negative effects an uncontrolled tongue can have on others. 1/14 ↓↓

REVIEW OUTLINE (MODIFIED).

- ▶▶ Vv 1-2, ~ James points out ~ the significance ~ of a controlled tongue.
- ▶▶ 3-5a, ~ controlled tongue ~ is powerful influence for good, ~ out of proportion to its size.
- ▶▶ vv 5b-6, ~ shows the destructiveness ~ of an uncontrolled tongue.
- ▶▶ In vv 7-8a, ~ he shows the untamable nature ~ of the tongue.
- ▶▶ In v 8b, ~ as noted, ~ James gives a brutally realistic description of the tongue.
- ▶▶ And then in vv 9-12, ~ the inconsistency ~ of the tongue.

LAST TIME ~ WE STUDIED THE 1ST POINT OF THE OUTLINE, ~ THE SIGNIFICANCE ~ of a controlled tongue.

- ▶▶ Today, ~ we'll take up the next 2 points of the outline, ~ covering vv 3-6.
 - ▷▷ Vv 3-5a, ~ the controlled tongue ~ is a powerful influence for good, ~ out of proportion to its size.
 - ▷▷ Vv 5b-6, ~ the destructiveness ~ of an uncontrolled tongue on the one speaking.

THE CONTROLLED TONGUE ~ IS A POWERFUL INFLUENCE FOR GOOD, ~ out of proportion to its size, ~ vv 3-5a.

IN VV 3-4, ~ 2 ILLUSTRATIONS ~ showing the powerful influence of the tongue ~ for good.

- ▶▶ A horse and bridle, ~ and a ship and its rudder. 2/14 ↴↴

USES HORSES AS THE 1st, ~ v 3.

IF ~ [OR, ~ WHEN] ~ WE PUT BITS INTO THE MOUTHS OF HORSES ~ SO THAT ~ ¶¶

▶▶they obey us, ~ we guide their whole bodies as well.

▶▶In both illustrations ~ the analogy is between ~ the small controlling device ~ and the larger entity it controls.

ALTHOUGH THE HORSE WAS WELL KNOWN TO JAMES' READERS, ~ ¶¶

▶▶horses were not possessed by the average person.

▶▶The horse is first mentioned in Scripture ~ in connection with Joseph's experience in Egypt.

▶▶In later centuries ~ horses ~ appear as the possession of kings and nobles ~ ¶¶

▷▷and were used primarily ~ for military purposes.

▶▶The average reader of James ~ would not have thought ~ of a humble plow-horse ~ ¶¶

▷▷but of a prancing war horse, ~ vigorous and high-spirited.

THIS MOST SPIRITED OF BEASTS, ~ far larger than a person ~ & with a will of its own, ~ ¶¶

▶▶could nevertheless be controlled ~ through the use of a bridle.

▷▷Can you imagine ~ the chaos that would ensue ~ if war horses were not under control during battle? 3/14 ¶¶

THE BRIDLE, ~ THOUGH IT IS SO SMALL, ~ EXERTS ITS CURBING INFLUENCE ~ over the whole body of the strong horse, ~ 77

▶▶so that ~ it pursues ~ a straight ~ and not ~ an erratic ~ course, ~ 77

▷▷a course that is determined by its rider.

THINK ABOUT IT:

▶▶If the principle in view works with horses, ~ how much more with humans!

▶▶The control of our tongues, ~ though they're small, ~ exerts a curbing influence over our whole life.

▶▶Recall that, ~ in v 2c, ~ James suggested ~ 77

▷▷that self-control in all other areas of our lives ~ will be relatively easy ~ once we've mastered our tongues.

▶▶Controlling our tongue ~ will help us pursue ~ a straight ~ and not ~ an erratic ~ course in life.

▶▶On the other hand, ~ an uncontrolled tongue ~ will create chaos in our lives.

IN V 4, ~ WE HAVE THE 2nd ILLUSTRATION ~ SHOWING THE POWERFUL INFLUENCE OF the tongue for good.

LOOK AT THE SHIPS ALSO: ~~ THOUGH ~ THEY ARE SO LARGE AND ARE DRIVEN BY strong winds, ~ 77

▶▶they are guided by a very small rudder ~ wherever the will of the pilot directs. 4/14 11

▶▶Turning next to the largest inanimate object that James's contemporaries might attempt to steer, ~ 77

▷▷he mentions ~ the great ships that sailed the seas.

▶▶Some of them were indeed very large.

▷▷The Egyptian grain ship on which Paul was shipwrecked ~ carried 276 passengers in addition to its cargo.

"THE PILOT," ~ OF COURSE, ~ IS THE ONE WHO STEERS THE SHIP.

▶▶In fact, ~ the Grk wd trans ~ pilot ~ means ~ to keep something on course.

▶▶The pilot was responsible ~ 77

▷▷for guiding the ship with the rudder ~ on its correct course.

EVEN MORE SO THAN WITH THE HORSE, ~ 77

▶▶James stresses the size and power of the great ships, ~ 77

▷▷which are likewise controlled and guided ~ by something ~ a miniscule fraction ~ of their size.

▶▶Although ships can be huge and buffeted by strong winds, ~ 77

▷▷a tiny mechanism at one end of each boat can steer it. 5/14 11

↳↳Phrase ~ *very small* ~ emphasizes ~ how tiny the rudder is compared to the ship.

PILOTS RETAIN THEIR POWER OVER SHIPS ~ BECAUSE THEY CONTROL THE RUDDERS.

▶▶If, ~ however, ~ a rudder does not work properly, ~ the ship can veer completely out of control.

▶▶If the rudder is uncontrolled in the presence of a strong wind, ~ ㄱㄱ

▷▷the ship can run aground ~ or spin across the wind and capsize.

▶▶Even if the ship is controlled, ~ a misguided rudder can send it ~ to the wrong place.

BOTH ILLUSTRATIONS ~ FOCUS ON THE CONTROL ~ ㄱㄱ

EXERCISED BY A PERSON ~ THROUGH A SMALL OBJECT ~ ON A LARGE BODY.

▶▶A strict application of this imagery would suggest ~ ㄱㄱ

▷▷that the believer ~ similarly uses the tongue to control the whole body.

↳↳But it is difficult to understand ~ how the tongue ~ could directly control the whole body.

PROBABLY ~ WE SHOULD MAKE THE APPLICATION A LITTLE DIFFERENTLY.

▶▶Just as the bit determines ~ the direction of the horse ~ and the rudder the ship, ~ ㄱㄱ

▷▷so the tongue ~ can determine ~ the destiny ~ of the individual. 6/14 ㄱㄱ

▶▶ When the believer exercises careful control of the tongue, ~ it can be presumed ~ 77

▷▷ that they also are able ~ 77

↳↳ to direct ~ their whole life ~ in its proper, ~ divinely charted ~ course.

▶▶ But when that tongue is not restrained, ~ small though it is, ~ 77

▷▷ the whole life ~ is likely to be ~ uncontrolled and undisciplined also.

▶▶ And an uncontrolled tongue ~ is self-destructive.

▷▷ Prov. 10:14b, ~ the mouth of a fool brings ruin near.

↳↳ A fool is not to be taken ~ as a demented or insane person ~ but simply ~ 77

→→ as a foolish person, ~ someone who says things ~ without thinking.

↳↳ Brings ruin near ~ has the sense that ~ "destruction is present" ~ or ~ 77

→→ "trouble is about to happen."

▷▷ Prov. 13:3b (NIV), ~ those who speak rashly ~ will come to ruin.

↳↳ This rashness ~ could show itself in ~ promises, ~ assertions, ~ disclosures.

→→ The ruin could be ~ financial, ~ social, ~ physical, ~ or ~ spiritual. 7/14 11

THE BRIDLE AND THE RUDDER, ~ MINISCULE COMPARED TO HORSES AND SHIPS
respectively, ~ ¶¶

HAVE ENORMOUS ~ POSITIVE EFFECTS.

▶▶ And the controlled tongue ~ likewise, ~ is a powerful influence for good in our lives, ~ out of proportion to its size.

IN V 5a, ~ JAMES APPLIES ~ THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF VV 3-4.

SO ALSO ~ THE TONGUE IS A SMALL MEMBER, ~ YET IT BOASTS OF GREAT THINGS.

▶▶ Grammatically, ~ the phrase ~ So also ~ shows that James is drawing a conclusion from vv 3-4.

▶▶ The importance of the bit and the rudder, ~ small though they may be, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ is comparable ~ to the importance of the little member, ~ the tongue.

▶▶ To put it differently, ~ just as the bit and the rudder ~ are small objects in relation to the entities they control, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ so the tongue ~ is a small member of the body ~ that exercises a significance ~ ¶¶

↪↪ far out of proportion to its size.

'BOASTING' ~ IS OFTEN IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ~ A SINFUL ACTIVITY, ~ ¶¶

▶▶ and manifests an arrogant inappropriateness before God. 8/14 ¶¶

▶▶ Here, ~ however, ~ 'boasting' ~ is used ~ without ~ these negative connotations.

▷▷ Remember, ~ the imm. context (3-5a) shows that James presenting tongue ~ 77

↳↳ as a powerful influence for good, ~ out of proportion to its size.

▷▷ And it can legitimately boast about its power ~ to determine a person's destiny.

▶▶ Believe that's what James doing here, ~ emphasizing the powerful influence for good.

▶▶ Just as the bridle and the rudder have ~ an enormous positive effect, ~ 77

▷▷ a controlled tongue ~ also can have ~ enormous positive effects in our lives.

IN 5b-6, ~ JAMES NOW TURNS HIS ATTENTION ~ TO THE DESTRUCTION ~ 77

AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE CAN WREAK IN A BELIEVER'S LIFE.

▶▶ Image: ~ Fire.

▶▶^{5b} How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! ~ ~⁶ And the tongue ~ is a fire, ~ a world of unrighteousness. ~ 77

▷▷ The tongue ~ is set among our members, ~ staining ~ the whole body, ~ 77

↳↳ setting on fire ~ the entire course of life ~ [i.e., ~ the entire course of one's life], ~ and set on fire by hell. 9/14 11

THE EFFECT OF THIS CHOICE OF IMAGE CAN BE SHOWN ~ BY COMPARING IT TO another possible image.

▶▶ If he had compared the tongue ~ to an ax, ~ he could have portrayed quite vividly ~ ¶¶

▷▷ a destruction of a large tree ~ by a small tool.

▶▶ Instead of such an isolated act of destruction, ~ however, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ James chose to portray ~ a spreading destruction.

▶▶ An ax destroys ~ one tree at a time.

▶▶ With our tongues, ~ one act of evil starts a destructiveness ~ ¶¶

▷▷ that spreads beyond the initial act ~ and affects ~ our whole lives.

WHAT KIND OF SPREADING ~ DOES JAMES HAVE IN MIND?

▶▶ With the words, ~ **members and body**, ~ it is easy to envision ~ ¶¶

▷▷ the spreading of evil through a church family ~ because of ~ gossip, ~ slander, ~ and criticisms.

▶▶ If Paul had written this passage, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ we might expect him ~ to employ his image of the church as the body of Christ ~ ¶¶

↳ ↳ to describe injury done to other lives ~ by one person's impure speech. 10/14 ¶¶

▶▶ But James's reference to the body ~ appears to be in the Jewish sense ~ of the whole person ~ ¶¶

▷▷ rather ~ than a figure of speech ~ for the church.

↳↳ Remember ~ he was writing to Jewish Christians.

▶▶ His focus ~ is more on the destruction ~ of the impure speaker's ~ own life.

WHAT IS MOST LIKELY ON JAMES'S MIND ~ IS NOT THE REACTION OF OTHERS TO our speech ~ ¶¶

▶▶ but the ~ spreading of sin ~ from our speech ~ to the rest of our life.

▶▶ Be hateful with our tongue, ~ and we will be ~ hateful with other aspects of our behavior.

▶▶ If we do not discipline and purify our speech, ~ we will not discipline or purify ~ the rest of our life.

JAMES' LANGUAGE ~ IS NEITHER MILD NOR RESTRAINED HERE ~ ¶¶

▶▶ in his description of the evil from our speech that can be unleashed into our lives.

▶▶ The tongue is ~ a world of unrighteousness, ~ staining the whole body, ~ setting on fire the entire course of one's life, ~ and set on fire by hell.

▶▶ James does not sugar coat this.

▶▶ He tough with us ~ because he wants us to be fully aware of reality. 11/14 ¶¶

▶▶ And again, ~ he does it out of love.

▶▶ Every command of God in Scripture

JAMES GIVE US ~ A RAPID SUCCESSION OF IMAGES OF THE TONGUE ~ ¶¶

▶▶ prompted ~ by the devastation he sees ~ that comes from an uncontrolled tongue.

THE TONGUE ~ IS A WORLD OF UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

▶▶ Presumably, ~ James wants to suggest that the tongue contains within it ~ the sins of the fallen world.

▶▶ Jesus, ~ it will be remembered, ~ said ~ that what comes out of the mouth ~ defiles a person.

▷▷ And he explained further ~ that the mouth expressed the heart, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ in which are found ~ evil thoughts, ~ murder, ~ adultery, ~ sexual immorality, ~ theft, ~ false witness, ~ slander.

▷▷ Jesus also said, ~ out of the abundance of the heart ~ the mouth speaks.

▶▶ No other 'member' of the body, ~ perhaps, ~ wreaks so much havoc ~ to the godly life.

NEXT, ~ JAMES SPEAKS OF THE TONGUE ~ ¶¶

▶▶ as one of the "members," ~ or parts, ~ of the human person ~ that stains the whole body.

↳↳ I.e., ~ person/personality. 12/14 ¶¶

▶▶ The language of "stain" here implies ~ the guilt and shame ~ brought upon the person ~ ¶¶

▷▷ who speaks sinfully.

▶▶ The reference to the "whole body" ~ emphasizes ~ how sin cannot be limited ~ ¶¶

▷▷ to one part of the human person.

▶▶ Sinful speech ~ will lead to countless other sinful actions, ~ ¶¶

▷▷ staining the human person with ~ guilt, ~ regret, ~ and even ~ physical problems.

WE'VE TALKED ABOUT THIS BEFORE REGARDING SIN IN GENERAL.

▶▶ A genuine believer ~ is never more miserable ~ ¶¶

▷▷ than when we are not following ~ our Lord's word.

▷▷ Sin ~ brings only ~ a fleeting period ~ of happiness.

▷▷ But ultimately ~ sin brings ~ misery and inner turmoil ~ into our lives.

↳↳ David recalled the time after he sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah, ~ ¶¶

→→ when he kept silent ~ & refused to confess his sin to God. ⇔⇔

↳↳ Ps. 32:3-4 (CSB), ~ When I kept silent, ~ my bones ~ became brittle ~ from my groaning all day long. ~ For day and night ~ your hand was heavy on me; ~ my strength was drained ~ as in the summer's heat. 13/14 ¶¶

▶▶ More to James' point.

▷▷ A person's own sinful words ~ will eat them alive.

NEXT, ~ JAMES SAYS ~ THAT AN UNCONTROLLED TONGUE ~ sets on fire ~ the entire course of life.

▶▶ I.e., ~ the entire course of one's life.

▶▶ He now depicts the tongue's sinfulness ~ as a conflagration ~ 77

▷▷ spreading through the time span ~ of one's life ~ as well as ~ the diversity ~ of one's behavior.

▶▶ But ~ this is more serious even than the length of time involved.

▶▶ The fundamental direction of one's life ~ is affected.

▶▶ James refers to this ~ with a phrase that is unique in all of Scripture.

▷▷ The phrase translated, ~ the entire course of life.

▷▷ Its literal meaning would be ~ "wheel of existence" ~ or ~ "wheel of human origin."

▶▶ James uses it ~ as a figurative expression to mean ~ the whole course ~ of one's life.

▶▶ The phrase emphasizes ~ the thorough and far-reaching destruction ~ in one's life ~ 77

▷▷ wrought by their uncontrolled tongue.

THE LAST IMAGE OF THE UNCONTROLLED TONGUE JAMES GIVES US IS THAT ~ 77

▶▶ it is set on fire by hell.

▶▶ This reveals ~ the origin ~ of the uncontrolled tongue's destructive fire.

▶▶ It adds a deep ~ spiritual dimension ~ to the picture.

▶▶ IOW, ~ the uncontrolled tongue ~ is only the fuse.

▶▶ The source of the deadly fire ~ is hell itself.

▶▶ The uncontrolled tongue ~ permits itself to be used by satanic evil.

▷▷ And Paul exhorts us in Rom ~ to not give any part of ourselves to sin.

▷▷ Rom. 6:13 (NIV), ~ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin ~ as an instrument of wickedness, ~ but rather ~ offer yourselves to God ~ as those who have been brought from death to life; ~ and offer every part of yourself to him ~ as an instrument of righteousness.

BACK TO JAMES

▶▶ In connecting the uncontrolled tongue with hell, ~ James does not speak of it ~ 77

▷▷ as the fit place of punishment ~ for the sins of the tongue.

▶▶ Most likely, ~ to his mind ~ it calls up the satanic hosts of evil ~ who will yet be consigned to hell; ~ 77

▷▷ but are now habitually active ~ in motivating human wickedness.

▶▶ Later, ~ James will speak of a wisdom that is satanic.

▶▶ All too readily ~ an uncontrolled tongue ~ 77

▷▷ can become the tool of Satan and his hosts ~ in spreading the fire of hell.

THE MESSAGE FROM JAMES ~ IS CRYSTAL CLEAR.

▶▶ An uncontrolled tongue ~ is no minor thing.

NOW, ~ IT IS NOT IN KEEPING WITH JAMES'S PURPOSE ~ TO ELABORATE the opposite truth.

▶▶ But we should mention it.

▶▶ The opposite truth is this.

▷▷ A controlled tongue ~ can be touched by fire ~ from God's altar ~ to be used in his service.

↪↪ Is. 6:1-9

▶▶ A controlled tongue ~ is no insignificant thing either.

▶▶ It can be used mightily by God.

▶▶ To paraphrase Paul.

▷▷ Offer yourselves to God ~ as those who have been brought from death to life; ~ and offer [your tongue] to him ~ as an instrument of righteousness. 16/16