

Proverbs Week #103 (11:9)

“With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered.” Proverbs 11:9

The book of Proverbs has much to say about how one uses their mouth. We are told here that a godless man destroys his neighbor. In what way does his speech “destroy” his neighbor? The Hebrew word שחַח *shachat* occurs often in the Tanach and can be understood as “to ruin deliberately, wish to destroy, or be able to destroy.” This root is used in Gen. 6:11 when God looked down on all the inhabitants of the Earth and proclaimed, “Now the earth was corrupt (root – *shachat*) in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” Here the word signifies a corruption in mankind. This same root is used again in Gen. 18 when Abraham is talking to the Angel of the Lord about the coming destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Other examples of this root are what the frogs did in Egypt (Psa. 78:45) and what the Angel of the Lord did to Israel as a result of David’s sin of numbering the people (1 Chr. 21:14–15). The negative effects or outcomes from the godless person’s speech are reversed in the righteous person. They are said to be delivered from the destruction. How does that work?

To Learn: How we speak, what we speak, and when we speak are all important to consider if we want to be wise. Remember, wisdom is not just knowing certain things but the skill to live a virtuous or moral life. I once took a college course called Interpersonal Communication. The course was focused on what communication between people is all about and how one could improve their communication skills. It didn’t seem natural. One assignment I had during the course was to say things in different ways. I was required to practice these new phrases and to remember if the communication was better, worse, or if there was no noticeable change. You should try it sometime. [Examples of different ways: Please first; ok—not why; may I go out and play or is there anything you need me to do?]

To Impart: The importance of what we say and hear is connected. Yeshua teaches us that we will know the truth and the truth will set us free. What is this freedom Yeshua describes? If the righteous are saved from the destruction or corruption of evil speech, what does their deliverance look like?

I have always liked the illustration of a train in relationship to freedom. When is a train free? When is a big locomotive with hundreds of cars in tow most free? Is it most free if it is on a street (like a freeway or a dirt road in the back woods)? Or is it truly free when all its wheels are placed firmly on train tracks? Trains work best when they are operating according to their manufacturer’s specifications (most everything does really). When we follow God’s instructions for how to speak we will discover what “free speech” is all about.

Each of the following verses are from the Psalms. As part of the Spirit’s inspired music they teach us a little bit of what our attitude should be in regards to the words we speak.

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

You have tried my heart; You have visited me by night; You have tested me and You find nothing; I have purposed that my mouth will not transgress. Psalm 17:3

I said, “I will guard my ways that I may not sin with my tongue; I will guard my mouth as with a muzzle while the wicked are in my presence.” Psalm 39:1

With my lips I have told of All the ordinances of Your mouth. I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. Psalm 119:13,14

Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. Psalm 141:3