

Proverbs 14:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident.

Analysis

This proverb contrasts wise caution with foolish recklessness. "A wise man feareth, and departeth from evil" describes prudent behavior. Chakham yare vesur mera (חכם ירא וסר מרע, wise fears and turns from evil). Yare (ירא, fear, revere) leads to sur (sur, turning aside, departing) from ra (רע, evil, harm). Wisdom recognizes danger and avoids it.

"But the fool rageth, and is confident" reveals foolish audacity. Ukhesil mit'abber uvotech (עבֵר מִתְעַבֵּר וּבָטַח, but fool rages and is confident). Abar (עָבֵר, pass over, transgress) in reflexive form suggests arrogant self-confidence. Batach (בָּטַח, trust, be confident, feel secure) describes the fool's false assurance despite obvious danger.

The proverb addresses risk assessment. The wise fear God and consequences, leading to avoiding evil. Fools, lacking proper fear, charge ahead confidently into disaster. Proverbs 22:3 states: "A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." Fear of the LORD is wisdom's beginning (Proverbs 9:10). Without it, people confidently pursue destruction. Hebrews 11:7 commends Noah who "moved with fear, prepared an ark." Christians should fear God, not people (Matthew 10:28), and flee temptation (1 Corinthians 6:18, 10:14, 2 Timothy 2:22).

Historical Context

Ancient warfare, travel, and daily life involved real dangers. Wise people assessed risks—avoiding enemy strongholds, testing bridges, watching for wild animals. Fools recklessly charged ahead, trusting luck or false confidence. Military disasters often resulted from leaders' arrogant self-confidence despite warnings (1 Kings 22:1-40). The proverb urged prudent fear over foolish presumption.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. In what areas might you be acting like the fool—confidently pursuing paths despite warning signs?
2. How does proper fear of God produce wise caution that protects you from evil?
3. What does it mean to 'depart from evil' practically when you recognize spiritual, moral, or practical dangers?

Interlinear Text

מְתַعֲבֵב רֵא כָּסֵיל מְכַעַן
A wise man feareth and departeth from evil but the fool rageth
H2450 H3373 H5493 H7451 H3684 H5674

בָּזְבֻּן:

and is confident

H982

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 22:3 (Evil): A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.

Proverbs 3:7 (Evil): Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 (Evil): Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Proverbs 29:9 (Parallel theme): If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.

Proverbs 28:14 (Parallel theme): Happy is the man that feareth alway: but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief.

Proverbs 16:17 (Evil): The highway of the upright is to depart from evil: he that keepeth his way preserveth his soul.

Proverbs 16:6 (Evil): By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

Genesis 42:18 (Parallel theme): And Joseph said unto them the third day, This do, and live; for I fear God:

Genesis 33:9 (Parallel theme): And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

Psalms 119:120 (Parallel theme): My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments.