

Proverbs 17:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

Analysis

Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly. A mother bear whose cubs have been taken is proverbially dangerous—violent, irrational, unstoppable. Yet this proverb says meeting such a beast is preferable to encountering a fool in full folly. Why? Bears are predictably dangerous; fools are unpredictably destructive. Their irrationality, pride, and moral blindness make them more dangerous than wild beasts. Believers should avoid fools (Proverbs 14:7) and pursue wisdom through Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30).

Historical Context

Ancient Near East had dangerous wildlife—lions, bears (2 Samuel 17:8, 2 Kings 2:24). Shepherds regularly faced such threats (1 Samuel 17:34-35). Everyone knew encountering an enraged bear meant probable death. This proverb's shocking comparison—even that is better than a fool—emphasizes folly's destructive power. Fools caused community disasters through violence, false witness, bad counsel (Rehoboam's foolish advisors, 1 Kings 12).

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. Why are fools more dangerous than wild beasts, and how does this affect whom you associate with?
2. What characteristics of fools in their folly make them so destructive?
3. How can you ensure you're not being the fool others should avoid?

Interlinear Text

פָּגַע וְשָׂא	דֵּבַר	שָׁדַד וְלָקַח	בְּאִישׁ	וְלֹא	כִּי יִלְכֹּד
of her whelps meet	Let a bear	robbed	a man	rather than	a fool
H6298	H1677	H7909	H376	H408	H3684

בְּאַלְתָּוֹ:
in his folly
H200

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 13:8 (Parallel theme): I will meet them as a bear that is bereaved of her whelps, and will rend the caul of their heart, and there will I devour them like a lion: the wild beast shall tear them.

2 Samuel 17:8 (Parallel theme): For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people.