

Proverbs 17:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water:
therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.

Analysis

The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with. *Poter mayim reshit madon* (פּוֹטֵר מַיִם רֵשִׁית מַדּוֹן, releasing water is the beginning of strife). Like breaching a dam, once strife starts it's unstoppable. *Velifney hitgalle hariv netosh* (וְלִפְנֵי הִתְגַּלֵּעַ הָרִיב נֶטוֹשׁ, so before the quarrel breaks out, leave off). Abandon contentions before they escalate uncontrollably. The proverb urges conflict prevention—once unleashed, strife floods destructively. Jesus blessed peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Paul commanded pursuing peace (Romans 14:19, Hebrews 12:14).

Historical Context

Ancient irrigation systems used dams and channels. Once breached, water flooded uncontrollably, destroying crops and property. Similarly, unchecked strife escalated into feuds, violence, community division. Biblical examples include Abraham peacefully separating from Lot to prevent strife (Genesis 13:8-9), versus Absalom's revolt that flooded Israel with civil war (2 Samuel 15-18). Wise people prevented strife's beginning; fools let it flood.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What conflicts are you allowing to begin that will flood uncontrollably if not stopped now?
2. How can you practice the wisdom of abandoning contention before it breaks out?
3. What does pursuing peace (Romans 14:19) look like practically in your current relationships?

Interlinear Text

פ וְטָר	מַיִם	רֵאשִׁית	מִדּוֹן	וּלְפָנַי	הֵ תִגַּל ע
is as when one letteth out	water	The beginning	of strife	before	it be meddled
H6362	H4325	H7225	H4066	H6440	H1566
הֵרִיב	נָטוּשׁ:				
contention	therefore leave off				
H7379	H5203				

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 25:8 (Parallel theme): Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbour hath put thee to shame.

Proverbs 20:3 (Parallel theme): It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (Parallel theme): And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Proverbs 15:1 (Parallel theme): A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.

