

Proverbs 17:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy.

Analysis

He that begetteth a fool doeth it to his sorrow: and the father of a fool hath no joy. Yoled kesil letugah lo (יולד כסיל לתוֹגָה לוּ), begetting a fool—sorrow to him). Foolish children bring parental grief. Velo-yismach avi naval (וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַח אָבִי נָבָל), and the father of a fool has no joy). Naval (נָבָל) (fool, vile person, morally deficient) describes the worst foolishness. This proverb mourns parental heartbreak over foolish children. While parents can't control adult children's choices, they should faithfully teach wisdom. Ultimately, God grieves over His foolish children who reject Him (Luke 19:41).

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern culture emphasized family honor through children. Foolish children brought disgrace, destroyed family reputation, squandered inheritance. Biblical examples include: Eli's sons disgracing him (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25), David grieving over Absalom (2 Samuel 18:33), the prodigal son wasting his inheritance (Luke 15:11-13). Yet the prodigal's repentance brought joy (Luke 15:24), showing wisdom can be recovered through grace.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. For parents: Are you faithfully teaching your children wisdom even though you can't control their ultimate choices?
2. For children: Do you bring your parents sorrow or joy through foolish or wise living?
3. How does God as Father grieve over His foolish children, and what brings Him joy (Luke 15:7, 10)?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא	לֹא	לֹת	וְסַעַר	וְלֹא	וְלֹת	וְלֹא	וְלֹת
He that begetteth	a fool	doeth it to his sorrow		H0	H3808	hath no joy	
H3205	H3684	H8424				H8055	
and the father	of a fool						
H1	H5036						

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 10:1 (Parallel theme): The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother.

Proverbs 19:13 (Parallel theme): A foolish son is the calamity of his father: and the contentions of a wife are a continual dropping.

Proverbs 15:20 (Parallel theme): A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish man despiseth his mother.

Proverbs 17:25 (Parallel theme): A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him.

Genesis 26:34 (Parallel theme): And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:

