

Proverbs 18:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.

Analysis

This proverb employs military imagery—'strong city' and 'bars of a castle'—to describe relational alienation. 'A brother offended' (אָח נִפְשָׁה/ach nifsha, a brother transgressed against) is 'harder to be won' (מִקְרִיַּת־עֵז/miqqiryat-oz, than a fortified city to capture). The comparison is devastating: restoring a broken relationship is more difficult than conquering a walled fortress. 'Contentions are like the bars of a castle' (אֲרָמוֹן פְּבָרִיִּים וּמִדּוֹנִים/umedonim kivcriach armon)—arguments become immovable barriers, locking people into defensive positions. This reveals sin's relational devastation. Created for communion with God and others, humans after the Fall experience alienation as the deepest pain. Jesus prioritized reconciliation: 'if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother' (Matthew 5:23-24). Paul commanded: 'if it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men' (Romans 12:18). Yet this proverb acknowledges the sobering reality: some relationships, once broken, resist healing.

Historical Context

Ancient Israel's tribal and clan structure meant that familial relationships formed the social fabric. 'Brother' included blood relatives and covenant partners within the community. Offenses between brothers threatened not just individuals but entire family groups—potentially leading to blood feuds (2 Samuel 3:27; 2 Samuel 13-14). The law provided mechanisms for reconciliation: restitution for wrongs

(Leviticus 6:1-7), cities of refuge for manslaughter (Numbers 35), and required confrontation before escalation (Matthew 18:15-17 codifies principles rooted in Leviticus 19:17). When David's family fractured—Amnon's rape of Tamar, Absalom's murder of Amnon, Absalom's rebellion—the consequences were catastrophic. Early church unity depended on reconciliation—Paul confronted divisions in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:10-13) and urged Euodia and Syntyche to resolve their conflict (Philippians 4:2).

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. Is there a 'brother offended' in your life—someone estranged from you due to unresolved conflict?
2. What makes you defensive when others approach you with concerns, and how can you lower those 'castle bars'?
3. How does understanding the extreme difficulty of reconciliation motivate you to pursue peace before offenses create fortress-like barriers?

Interlinear Text

אָ ח	נִפְשׁ ע	מִקְרֵית	עַ ז	וּ מִדּוֹן ים
A brother	offended	city	is harder to be won than a strong	
H251	H6586	H7151	H5797	H4066
כְּבָר ים	אַרְמוֹן:			
are like the bars	of a castle			
H1280	H759			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 16:32 (Parallel theme): He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.

Acts 15:39 (Parallel theme): And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus;

Proverbs 6:19 (Parallel theme): A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.

1 Kings 12:16 (Parallel theme): So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.