

Proverbs 27:22

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart from him.

Analysis

Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle (אֶם-תִּכְתֹּשׁ אֶת-הָעִיל בַּמֶּכֶתֶשׁ בְּתוֹךְ הָרִיפּוֹת בְּעִלִּי, im-tikhtosh et-ha'evil bamakhitesh betokh harifot ba'eli)—the graphic imagery employs כָּתַשׁ (katash, 'to pound, beat') and מֶכֶתֶשׁ (makhtesh, 'mortar'), tools for grinding grain with an עֵל (eli, 'pestle'). The violent action suggests extreme measures applied to the עִיל (evil, 'fool').

Yet will not his foolishness depart from him (לֹא-תִסּוּר מִעָלָיו אִוְלָתוֹ, lo-tasur me'alav ivvalto)—the אִוְלָת (ivvelet, 'folly, foolishness') remains immovable. Proverbs distinguishes the פֶּתִי (peti, 'simple one' who can learn) from the עִיל ('fool' who rejects correction) and the לֵץ (lets, 'scoffer' who mocks wisdom). This fool has hardened beyond discipline's reach—a sobering warning about the calcification of character.

Historical Context

Mortars and pestles were ubiquitous in ancient Near Eastern households for grinding grain, spices, and herbs. The proverb's hyperbole—grinding a person like grain—would have immediately communicated the futility of trying to reform someone who refuses correction. Even the most forceful discipline cannot change a hardened fool.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. Are there areas of your life where you're resisting correction, risking the hardening of folly?
2. How can you cultivate a teachable spirit that remains soft to God's discipline?
3. Who in your life might need your prayers more than your correction, having hardened against instruction?

Interlinear Text

אָ דאָ	תִּכְתּוֹשׁ	אֶת	הָאֵל יֵלֵן	בַּמִּכָּתִישׁ	בֵּית וְכֵן
H518	Though thou shouldst bray	H853	a fool	in a mortar	among
	H3806		H191	H4388	H8432
הָרִיפּוֹת	בְּעֵל יָד	לֹא	תָס וּרָ	יֵעַל יוֹ	אֶלְתָּנוֹ:
wheat	with a pestle	H3808	depart	H5921	yet will not his foolishness
H7383	H5940		H5493		H200

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 23:35 (Parallel theme): They have stricken me, shalt thou say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.

Jeremiah 5:3 (Parallel theme): O LORD, are not thine eyes upon the truth? thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction: they have made their faces harder than a rock; they have refused to return.

Isaiah 1:5 (Parallel theme): Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.

Exodus 12:30 (Parallel theme): And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead.

Exodus 14:5 (Parallel theme): And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us?

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