

Psalms 107:27

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end.

Analysis

This verse continues describing sailors' extremity. 'They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man' depicts inability to stand as the ship pitches wildly. The comparison to drunkenness emphasizes loss of control and coordination. 'And are at their wits' end' translates kol chakhmah titbala (כָּל־חִכְמָתָם תִּתְבַּלַּעַ), literally 'all their wisdom is swallowed up'—their expertise, experience, and seamanship are useless. Professional mariners, skilled in navigation and weather, reach the limit of human ability. This teaches that there are circumstances where human wisdom, skill, and strength are completely insufficient. Only then do we truly cry out to God.

Historical Context

Jonah's experienced sailors tried every technique before crying to God (Jonah 1:5, 13). Even after throwing cargo overboard, they couldn't save the ship—only God's intervention (through Jonah) calmed the storm. Paul's shipwreck included experienced sailors whose efforts failed (Acts 27:15-20). The phrase 'at their wits' end' entered English from this verse, capturing the moment when human resources are exhausted.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Why does God sometimes bring us to 'wits' end' where human wisdom fails?
2. How does exhausting human solutions prepare hearts to cry out to God?
3. What modern circumstances bring people to realize human expertise is insufficient?

Interlinear Text

יָחֹגְגוּ	וְיִגְדְּלוּ	כַּשֵּׁכַח אִישׁ	וְכָל	חַכְמָתָם
They reel to and fro	and stagger	like a drunken man	H3605	and are at their wits
H2287	H5128	H7910		H2451

תִּתְּבַלֵּעַ:
end
H1104

Additional Cross-References

Job 12:25 (Parallel theme): They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.

Isaiah 29:9 (Parallel theme): Stay yourselves, and wonder; cry ye out, and cry: they are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink.

Isaiah 19:14 (Parallel theme): The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit.

Isaiah 19:3 (Parallel theme): And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards.

From KJV Study • kjevstudy.org