

# Isaiah 19:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?

## Analysis

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'Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counsellors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?' Egypt's vaunted wisdom fails. Zoan (Tanis) was a major Delta city and royal residence. Its 'princes' (sarim—officials, nobles) are 'fools' (evilim—stupid, foolish), and Pharaoh's counselors are 'brutish' (baar—senseless like animals). Their proud claims to ancient wisdom and royal lineage prove empty when unable to solve national crises. This mocks Egyptian pretensions—civilization priding itself on wisdom, scribal education, and ancient knowledge is exposed as foolish when confronted with divine judgment. True wisdom begins with fearing the LORD (Proverbs 9:10); apart from this foundation, even sophisticated knowledge is folly. Reformed epistemology emphasizes all true knowledge depends on right relationship with God as Creator and source of truth.

## Historical Context

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Egypt boasted the ancient world's most developed educational system, producing scribes, priests, and administrators trained in extensive literary traditions. Wisdom literature like 'The Instruction of Amenemope' influenced biblical wisdom literature. Royal counselors formed a professional class claiming descent from ancient sages. Yet despite this sophisticated intellectual culture, Egyptian policy repeatedly failed during Isaiah's period—failed alliances, military defeats, internal chaos. All their wisdom couldn't prevent decline. This validated the biblical

critique: worldly wisdom divorced from God is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). History shows impressive secular wisdom traditions ultimately failing without the fear of the LORD as foundation.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What does Egypt's failed wisdom teach about human knowledge divorced from fearing God?
2. How do impressive intellectual traditions prove futile under divine judgment?
3. Why is 'the fear of the LORD' the necessary foundation for true wisdom?

## Interlinear Text

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אֲנִי	אֱלֹהִים	שֶׁ הִי	צֶעַן	חֲכָמֵי יָם	עֵצָה	פֶּרַע הֵ
H389	H196	Surely the princes	of Zoan	of the wise	the counsel	of Pharaoh
		H8269	H6814	H2450	H6098	H6547
עֵצָה הֵ	נִבְעֵרָה הֵ	וְאֵי יִן	תֹּאמְרוּ	אֶל	פֶּרַע הֵ	בֶן
the counsel	is become brutish	H349	how say	H413	of Pharaoh	I am the son
H6098	H1197		H559		H6547	H1121
חֲכָמֵי יָם	אֲנִי	בֶן	מַלְכֵי	קְדָמָה:		
of the wise	H589	I am the son	kings	of ancient		
H2450		H1121	H4428	H6924		

## Additional Cross-References

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**Numbers 13:22** (Parallel theme): And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)

**Isaiah 30:4** (Parallel theme): For his princes were at Zoan, and his ambassadors came to Hanes.

**Acts 7:22** (Parallel theme): And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

**Psalms 78:43** (Parallel theme): How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan:

**1 Kings 4:30** (Parallel theme): And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt.

**Psalms 78:12** (Parallel theme): Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan.