

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

'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

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

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

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

פְּרַעַם	עָזָה	חַכְמַת	יִם	צָעֵן	שְׁרֵי	אַוְלִים	אָרֶן
H6547	H6098	H2450	H6814	H2450	H8269	H196	H389
of Pharaoh	the counsel	of the wise	of Zoan	the princes	Surely	the	Egypt
בָּנָעַרְתָּ	אָזָה	אַל	תֹּאמֶר	אֵיךְ	נִבְשַׁעַת	הַ	פְּרַעַם
H6547	H413	H559	H349	H589	H1197	H6098	H6547
I am the son	of Pharaoh	how say	1	say	brutish	the	the
בָּנָי	פְּרַעַם	אָזָה	אָל	אֵיךְ	נִבְשַׁעַת	הַ	בָּנָי
H1121	H6547	H6098	H413	H559	H1197	H6098	H1121
I am the son	of Pharaoh	the counsel	the	the	the	the	the
מֶלֶכִי	לְדוֹתָהָן	אַנְתִּי	מֶלֶכִי	אַנְתִּי	בָּנָי	פְּרַעַם	בָּנָי
H4428	H6924	H2450	H4428	H589	H1121	H6547	H1121
kings	of ancient	of the wise	I am the son	I am the son	brutish	the	the

Additional Cross-References

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.