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The Wise Counselors of Pharaoh Give Senseless Advice
19: 11-15

The wise counselors of Pharaoh give senseless advice DIG: Zoan and Memphis were major cities in Upper and Lower Egypt. Compared to the LORD's power and wisdom, what are their famed wise men like? What effect does their leadership have upon the country? How is this related to their consulting with the mediums and the spiritists in 19:3b? Since Egypt's plans (19:3a), natural resources (19:5-7) and leadership (19:11-12) were all dependent upon the LORD, what should that have said to Jews looking to Egypt instead of ADONAI for help? Could God's judgments in 19:1-15 be intended to bring about the events in 19:16-25?

REFLECT: To whom do you rely on for wisdom in your own life? Your gut feeling? Your friends? Your horoscope? Your family? or God? How much time do you spend asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom in making the important decisions in your life? How much do you rely on the Scriptures for direction the LORD has *already* given you? How often do you find yourself being wise in your own eyes?

An oracle concerning Egypt. The pro-**Egyptian** party in **Judah** wanted to look to **Egypt** for help against **the Assyrian** threat. But **Isaiah** pointed out that **Egypt** would be no help at all, because **she** too would be overwhelmed by **God's** judgment. In this poem of three nearly equal strophes **God** exposes the weaknesses that would supposedly make **Egypt** great: **her idols (19:1-4)**, **her wealth (19:5-10)**, and **her wisdom**.

If **Egypt** thought **she** had reason to be proud of **her** religion and **her** economy, **she** certainly thought **she** had reason to be proud of **her** wisdom **(First Kings 4:30)**. **The Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, however, describes why **Egypt's wisdom** would be unable to help **her**. **Egypt** was well known in the ancient world for its writings of wisdom and its **wise men.** Yet, **Isaiah** says that **their** wisdom would be of no more value to **them** than **their** idols or natural resources. In words similar to those addressed to the idols in **Chapters 40** and **41**, **Isaiah** challenges the **wise men** to a contest. Could they show **Pharaoh God's** plans for **Assyrian** invasion? Of course not. Then what reason would there be for **Judah** to trust in, or even fear, **Egypt**? **Her** gods were useless, **her** productivity was dependent on **God's** grace, and **her** supposed **wise men** were downright stupid. What could **Egypt** offer **Judah**?

Isaiah says that the officials and counselors of **Egypt** are **fools** and should not be counted on to save **the nation** from the coming destruction. **Isaiah** taunts **the officials of Zoan**, or advisors of **Pharaoh**, saying they **are nothing but fools** who **give senseless advice.** Those supposedly discerning counselors were giving **Pharoah** advice that would not be fit for an animal **(Psalm 49:20, 73:22)**. Specifically, it means *to be without spiritual discernment*. Therefore, it is linked here with the inability to see what **ADONAI** is doing, or to discern the spiritual cause behind the national, social and economic problems of the nation. **Isaiah** speaks to the wise men directly, asking sarcastically: **How can you say to Pharaoh, "I am one of the wise men, a disciple of the ancient kings" (19:11)? Their** plans had failed so many times that **Isaiah** is flabbergasted that **they** were still willing to claim to be the keepers of ancient wisdom. If the truth be known, **they** did not understand either the past **(14:24-27; 37:26)**, or the present.

The prophet even taunts **Pharaoh himself**, saying: **Where are your wise men now? Let them show you and make known what the LORD of heaven's**

angelic **armies has planned against Egypt (19:12).** He uses language that Paul uses many years later in **First Corinthians 1:20. God** is going to treat **Egypt** the way **He** did in the **Exodus**. How will the **wise men,** who lack wisdom from **God**, explain that? In fact, **they** cannot even tell **him** what **God's** plan of attack will be. **Isaiah** wonders out loud why **Pharaoh** even keeps them around.

The tragedy of **Egypt** was that the very ones who should have led **her** correctly were leading **her astray**. **The officials of Zoan (Numbers 13:22; Psalm 78:12 and 43; Isaiah 30:4; Ezekiel 30:14) have become fools, the leaders of Memphis (Jeremiah 2:16, 44:1, 46:14** and **19; Ezeki'el 30:13** and **16; Hosea 9:6) are deceived.** These **people** were **the** very **cornerstones** of **Egyptian** society **(Judges 20:2; First Samuel 14:38; Zechariah 10:4).** But if the cornerstone itself has no foundation, it is worthless. As a result, **the cornerstones of her peoples led Egypt astray (19:13).**

Without **God**, wisdom is limited in this world. This is why **the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).** It is also why there is no other foundation than **Christ Himself (First Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20; First Peter 2:6;** and **Isaiah 28:16).** This lack of wisdom has been consistently true of **Egypt** until this very day. **The leaders** of **Egypt** have led **their** country into four wars with **Isra'el**. Each with devastating results for **the Egyptians**. The foolishness of **the Egyptian** leadership was complete. The city **of Zoan** is in the north and the city **of Memphis** is in the south. So foolishness characterizes both north and south, both Upper and Lower **Egypt**. The result was that **Egypt** had been **led astray**.

The picture of a confused, drunken **Egypt** was no accident. **ADONAI** was the one who confused the arrogance and supposed wisdom of **Egypt**, just as **He** confused the language of the Tower of Babel (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Dn – Let Us Go Down and Confuse Their Language**). **The LORD has poured into them a spirit of dizziness; they make Egypt stagger in all that she does, as a drunkard staggers around in his vomit (19:14).** All **their** so-called **wisdom** was foolishness when compared to **ADONAI**, who was planning the onslaught. Having ignored the general revelation of **the LORD** and **exchanged the truth of God for a lie (Romans 1:18-32)**, **He** is going to treat **Egypt** again as **He** did at the **Exodus**.

No one in **Egypt** could do anything to avert the destruction. **There is nothing Egypt** could **do – head or tail, palm branch or reed (19:15).** Neither the **head** (the **palm branch**)**,** or the leaders, nor the **tail** (the **reed**), or the common people,

would hold back **God's** judgment. After the New Kingdom period ended, the greatness of **Egypt** would come to an end. **She** would be dominated by a whole series of foreign conquerors. It is not a surprise that **Isaiah** sees her situation as being hopeless **(9:13)**, like an ancient prostitute who does not realize that **she** has seen her better days. A century later **Ezeki'el** adds that as a result of this kind of devastation, **the Egyptians**, like **the Jews**, will be dispersed throughout the peoples of the earth for forty years. During that time, **Egypt** will be desolate and no one will pass through **(Ezeki'el 29:6-9).** Both **Isaiah** and **Ezeki'el** were appalled to think that **Judah** would compromise her faith in **God** for a hopeless, drunken **Egypt.**

Isaiah has already said: **Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own thought (5:21).** Unlike **Egypt** (or the world), we need to remember that true wisdom comes from **God (First John 2:15-17).** The Bible teaches us to **trust in the LORD with all** our **heart and lean *not* on** our **own understanding;** if we **acknowledge Him in all** our **ways,** then **He will make** our **paths straight (Proverbs 3:5-6).** Those, like **Egypt**, who refuse to **acknowledge Him** are nothing but fools **(Proverbs 26:12).** Which are you?