

Exodus 7:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments.

Analysis

Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. Pharaoh responds to Aaron's serpent miracle by summoning his court magicians. The Hebrew identifies three groups: חֲכָמִים (chakamim, "wise men"), מְכַשְּׁפִים (mekhashshephim, "sorcerers"), and חֲרַטְמִים (chartummim, "magicians" or "sacred scribes"). The chakamim were court advisors skilled in natural knowledge and political counsel. The mekhashshephim practiced forbidden occult arts (compare Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The chartummim were Egypt's elite priestly magicians—the same term used in Genesis 41:8 for those who failed to interpret Pharaoh's dreams before Joseph.

They also did in like manner (וַיַּעֲשֵׂה כֵן, vayya'asu-ken) indicates successful replication—their staffs also became serpents. The phrase **with their enchantments** (בְּלֹתֶת הֶם, belahatehem) literally means "with their secret arts" or "flames," suggesting occult practices involving incantations and magical techniques. This creates a theological problem: did they perform genuine supernatural acts, or was it sophisticated trickery?

Scripture doesn't explicitly answer whether demonic power enabled real transformation or whether clever illusion deceived observers. However, verse 12 provides the key: **Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods**—demonstrating Yahweh's superior power over all Egyptian magic and gods. The confrontation isn't

merely Moses versus magicians but Yahweh versus Egypt's deities (12:12). The magicians could replicate some signs (7:22, 8:7) but eventually failed (8:18-19), confessing "This is the finger of God."

Theologically, this passage reveals:

1. Satan possesses limited power to counterfeit God's works (2 Thessalonians 2:9)
2. God permits this display to demonstrate His ultimate supremacy
3. Pharaoh's hardening increases as he finds excuse to resist.

Paul references these magicians—Jannes and Jambres (2 Timothy 3:8)—as examples of those who oppose truth, resist God, and ultimately prove corrupt and foolish.

Historical Context

Ancient Egypt possessed sophisticated priestly and magical traditions dating back millennia. Egyptian magicians served in temple complexes, performing rituals, interpreting omens, and advising pharaohs. Archaeological discoveries include extensive magical papyri containing spells, incantations, and ritual instructions. The Harris Magical Papyrus and Westcar Papyrus describe magicians performing wonders before pharaohs, establishing cultural precedent for Exodus 7's confrontation.

Egyptian religion intertwined with magic—priests claimed to manipulate divine powers through correct formulas and rituals. The serpent held special significance: the uraeus (cobra) adorned pharaoh's crown symbolizing divine authority and protection. Serpent deities like Wadjet represented Lower Egypt. Aaron's serpent defeating Egyptian serpents symbolized Yahweh's superiority over Egyptian gods and pharaoh's supposed divine status.

Extra-biblical Jewish tradition (found in Targums and rabbinic literature) names two chief magicians as Jannes and Jambres—names Paul uses (2 Timothy 3:8). These traditions elaborate their opposition to Moses but acknowledge their ultimate failure. Early church fathers interpreted the magicians' limited success as

either demonic counterfeiting or sophisticated illusion. Augustine argued that demons can rearrange matter but cannot create truly new things—only God creates ex nihilo. The passage demonstrates that while evil may temporarily imitate divine power, God's authority ultimately prevails, vindicating His servants and judging His enemies.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How should Christians discern between genuine supernatural phenomena and demonic counterfeits or sophisticated deception?
2. What does Pharaoh's hardening through finding excuses teach us about the danger of rationalizing away clear evidence of God's power?

Interlinear Text

וְעַש־	וְלִמְכַשֵּׁפָים	וְלִבְכָּרִים	וְלִבְכָּרָא	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְפַרְעֹה	וְיְהִוְה	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְיְהִוְה	וְיְהִוְה
also called	H1571	Then Pharaoh	the wise men	and the sorcerers	they also did						
H7121		H6547	H2450	H3784	H6213						

וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם	וְגַם
H1571	H1992	now the magicians	of Egypt	with their enchantments	in like manner						
		H2748	H4714	H3858	H3651						

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 7:22 (References Egypt): And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the LORD had said.

Exodus 8:7 (References Egypt): And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt.

Exodus 8:18 (Parallel theme): And the magicians did so with their enchantments to bring forth lice, but they could not: so there were lice upon man, and upon beast.

2 Timothy 3:8 (Parallel theme): Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

Genesis 41:8 (References Egypt): And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled; and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt, and all the wise men thereof: and Pharaoh told them his dream; but there was none that could interpret them unto Pharaoh.

Daniel 2:2 (Parallel theme): Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 (Parallel theme): Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

Ephesians 4:14 (Parallel theme): That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

Daniel 5:7 (Parallel theme): The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. And the king spake, and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whosoever shall read this writing, and shew me the interpretation thereof, shall be clothed with scarlet, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.