

²⁸ On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt,
²⁹ the LORD said to Moses, ^a"I am the LORD; ^btell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I say to you."
³⁰ But Moses said to the LORD, "Behold, ^aI am of uncircumcised lips. How will Pharaoh listen to me?"

ESV **Exodus 7:1** And the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like ^aGod to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your ^bprophet.

² ^aYou shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the people of Israel go out of his land.

³ But ^aI will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I ^bmultiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt,

⁴ Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by **great acts of judgment**.

⁵ The Egyptians ^ashall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."

⁶ Moses and Aaron did so; **they did just as the LORD commanded them**.

⁷ Now Moses was ^aeighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three years old, when they spoke to Pharaoh.

⁸ Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron,

⁹ "When Pharaoh says to you, ^a"Prove yourselves by working a miracle,' then you shall say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and cast it down before Pharaoh, that it may become a serpent.'"

¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent.

¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they, the ^amagicians of Egypt, also ^bdid the same by their secret arts.

¹² For each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs.

¹³ Still ^aPharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, ^aas the LORD had said.

¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go.

¹⁵ ^aGo to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water. Stand on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your hand ^bthe staff that turned into a ^cserpent.

¹⁶ And you shall say to him, 'The ^aLORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you, saying, "Let my people go, ^bthat they may serve me in the wilderness. But so far, you have not obeyed."

¹⁷ Thus says the LORD, "By this ^ayou shall know that I am the LORD: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and ^bit shall turn into blood.

¹⁸ The fish in the Nile shall die, and the Nile will stink, and the Egyptians will ^agrow weary of drinking water from the Nile.'"

¹⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and ^astretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, their canals, and their ponds, and all their pools of water, so that they may become blood, and there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

²⁰ Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants he ^alifted up the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the ^bwater in the Nile turned into blood.

²¹ And the fish in the Nile died, and the Nile stank, so that the Egyptians ^acould not drink water from the Nile. There was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

²² But ^athe magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts. So ^bPharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as ^cthe LORD had said.

²³ Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart.

²⁴ And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the Nile.

²⁵ Seven full days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

(Exo 6:28-25 ESV)

A Sign of Things to Come: Swallowed Up in Victory

Exodus 6:28-7:13

Signs

Before the days of GPS, people used to drive down the main strip in a new city and pick the restaurant they would eat at by the sign out front. Often times those signs have the name of the restaurant on them. But other times, [the mere symbol](#) is enough. Little kids know that when they see those Golden Arches, that they have come to the land of the Happy Meal with the toy surprise. Though, after watching *Super-Size Me* and *The Bionic Burger*, I don't think I'll be letting my kids go back there any time soon.

Everyone knows how important signs are. They help the seller market his product and the buyer find it. Signs can [create emotional feelings](#) because people become attached to them, like when the Denver Broncos changed their logo from the free ranging wild Stallion that actually reminded you of the west to the bizarre extra-terrestrial that now sits atop their “predominantly orange” uniforms. Signs convey [important information](#), such as how far to the next gas station or where is the restroom. Signs are [bridges in time](#). Memorials or grave markers connect the present to the past, not physically perhaps, but emotionally through memory and nostalgia. Maps connect the present to the future by showing where you may go if you decide to take that particular route.

God has not left his church without signs, because he knows our great need to connect the world of matter with the world of spirit. Since we cannot see spirit, signs help us understand through physical representation what the spiritual realm is and how it functions. Like their secular counterparts, biblical signs likewise bridge long distances of time. When we take [communion](#), for instance, we are transported back through time by the bread and wine to that moment when Jesus ate with his disciples and told them how he would soon break his body and shed his blood for the forgiveness of their sins. Through the sign, we are connected to our brothers Peter, James, John and the rest as if we were really there with them in that upper room. Through the sign, we are lifted up into heavenly places, where we are seated with Christ Jesus at his glorious table far above rulers and principalities, so that we may eat and feast in safety with him who is the manna come down from heaven.

Recap

One day, long ago, a man named Moses happened to be tending his sheep on the slopes of a rugged mountain. Suddenly, he saw a mighty [sign: A bush on fire that was not](#)

consumed. The Angel of the LORD appeared to Moses in that bush and told him to take off his sandals, because the place upon which he was standing was holy ground. He conveyed his name to Moses as **Yahweh**: “**I AM WHO I AM**,” the ever present, ever living God of everything. Then the Angel began to communicate to Moses his will, and how he was going to return to his brothers and perform mighty signs and wonders among them and among the Egyptians. **Moses chafed** at the thought of going back to the place where he was driven out so long ago by both the Egyptians and his brothers.

But the LORD had a plan to convince Moses. He would give Moses another sign, a fulfillment sign, a sign that would take faith to believe, since it would not be fulfilled until much later. Nevertheless, it would be sign to him that the LORD was with him when he returned with his people to this same mountain (**Ex 3:12**). In the meantime, God would give to Moses the power to perform other signs doing nothing but obeying God’s word and using nothing but the staff in his hand.

He was to go before the elders of his people, take his staff and throw it on the ground where it would become a serpent. The word used for **serpent** in **Exodus 4:3** is *nachash*, the same word used to describe the **devil** in **Genesis 3**. When Moses would pick it up by the tail, it would turn back into a staff. Moses did go before the elders, and they believed him when he showed them this and other signs that he had been given to perform so that they might believe that God had sent him.

Moses then went before Pharaoh, with his brother Aaron at his side, and immediately forgot who he was. Thinking *himself* the one who would convince Pharaoh to listen, Moses gave demands and forgot to convey the exact message that the LORD had sent him to say. And Pharaoh laughed Moses right out of the great hall (just as the LORD had said). Then the elders came to Moses and complained about the bitter way that Pharaoh was now treating them no thanks to Moses and Aaron who were to blame for the Egyptians ruthless treatment of them.

Moses, now greatly humbled, returns to the LORD where he is given the same, this time while in Egypt, and nothing new has changed. The promise remains sure. God will deliver the Israelites with a mighty hand and will harden the Pharaoh until he has glorified himself to such a degree that it causes even the giants in Canaan to tremble at the sound of his name. God knows all this future because of his omniscience and omnipotence. Moses may rest assured.

Second Meeting with Pharaoh

So Moses and Aaron go before the Pharaoh a second time because the LORD had commanded it of them again (Ex 6:29). Moses is still uncertain as to why the LORD should choose him (6:30), yet they did “just as the LORD commanded them” (7:6, 10 etc) in spite of their doubts and uncertainty. They were faithful in what they did from this time forth until the last Israelite set foot on the far side of the Sea. This time, there was no disobedience. There was no arrogance. There was only the word of God and his power that was on display to Pharaoh and his court. You should remember how in the midst of their doubts, and even into their old age (Moses being 80 and Aaron 83; Ex 7:7), they obeyed God. For, the LORD does not call us to be perfect people, but *faithful* people, people that will believe and act no matter what the consequences, simply because we know this is what God wants.

Let me pick up in the passage today with the first words of Exodus 7. “The LORD said to Moses, ‘See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.’” Though translations often say, “I have made you *like* God to Pharaoh,” it literally reads, “I have made you God to Pharaoh.” This is really an important point, for a couple of reasons.

First, when God’s word goes out from the mouth of his servant, it is God’s word and not the servant’s. Let me put this in terms relevant for today. At the time of the Reformation, there was a fight over the exact nature of God’s preached word. Though highly esteeming the word, Rome and the Enthusiasts (today’s Charismatics) believed that Scripture was a dead letter that needed supplementing by the church or the contemporary prophet. But the Reformers said that “the proclamation of the Word is not simply the preacher’s discourse about Christ. Rather, ‘the preached Word that comes to us by word of mouth is Jesus Christ himself now present with us.’”¹ Calvin said that, “When the gospel is preached in the name of God, it is as if God himself spoke in person.” This follows the Scriptures own teaching given by both Moses and Paul that God is as near as the preached word (Deut 30:14; Rom 10:8). Moses’ focus is on the Law. Paul’s is on the Gospel. But both are God’s word. And when Moses went to Pharaoh as the herald of the word, **he was God to Pharaoh.**

But this has significance for **another reason**, especially when we add the second part of Exodus 7:1 into the picture. It says, “Your brother Aaron shall be your prophet.” **A**

¹ Michael Horton, *People and Place*, p. 47.

prophet is someone who speaks for someone else. Moses is God's prophet, and Aaron is Moses' prophet. This is very important in the present context.

This chapter begins a sparring match between two rival gods. Remember that Pharaoh was actually deemed a god by Egypt. The serpents on his headband and staff (which relate to the story of Exodus 7) represented the power and authority that were given to him by the high gods of Egypt to be the living god over the people. It was Pharaoh's custom as god to have a spokesman issue all of his commands. You remember the famous words of Yule Brenner's Pharaoh, "So let it be written. So let it be done." He gave the orders and they proclaimed them to the people. Pharaoh, as god, needed mediators between himself and the people. The distance between them would reinforce in their minds his divine position.

As Phillip Ryken points out, "When Moses spoke to Pharaoh through Aaron, Pharaoh would have immediately recognized that Moses was claiming divine authority of his own."² Yet, we know that Moses did not claim to be a god or an angel. Rather, he always claimed to be the LORD's messenger. But the LORD had now given him the very status of God to Pharaoh as reinforced by Aaron's prophetic intercession in order to powerfully demonstrate who would be judged the real God by the end of the battle.

And now, the battle is about to be engaged. Meanwhile, before we see the first signs of sparring, we the reader are to keep in mind that this is only the beginning. For, God will "harden Pharaoh's heart, and though he multiply his signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, Pharaoh will not listen" (Exodus 7:3-4a). And verse 4b says, "I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment." And verse 5 says, "I will stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them."

So Moses is the first to go on the offensive. As the LORD commanded, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and Aaron "cast down his staff before Pharaoh and his servants, and it became a serpent" (Ex 7:10). Now, this is the same sign that occurred before the elders of Israel earlier in the book (Ex 4:30), with two differences. First, it says that this was Aaron's staff, whereas before it was Moses' staff. The difference seems to be accounted for when we remember that Aaron is speaking and acting for Moses.³

² Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, p. 195.

³ Were there two different staffs or one? Perhaps there are two, since Aaron's staff later budded and was placed in the Most Holy Place (Heb 9:4). Later on, Moses uses his staff (i.e. "The Staff of God;" Ex 4:20) to strike the rock. But then again, it is certainly quite possible that there is only one staff being used by two men. For a bizarre Jewish take on the oral traditions of the Staff of Moses (not to mention the snake that appeared to him on the ground), see <http://www.betemunah.org/staff.html>.

The second difference is more important. Rather than the staff transmogrifying into a *nachash* (the word used for Satan in Gen 3), it transforms into a *tannin*, a much rarer term (only 14 times in the OT) first used in **Genesis 1:20** where it is variously translated as **great whales** in older translations (KJV, GNV), or as **sea creatures** (ESV, NET, NIV, NLT, NKJV) or **sea monsters** (YLT, NAS, ASV, RSV, NRS) in newer translations.

The word appears side by side with Leviathan in **Psalm 74**.⁴ And in **Isaiah 27:1** all three terms are used as synonyms.⁵ Now, of course any good piece of writing will use panoply of words instead of the same expression over and over again. So it is possible that there is nothing more going on here than coloring the story with different terms.⁶ But I agree with some commentators who think there is something **theological** going on in the switching of terms.⁷ In fact, I think it is significant and fascinating.

Keep in mind that the word *tannin* can obviously mean “serpent” as it is translated here. And also keep in mind that close association between Pharaoh and the serpent gods as represented on his headdress and royal diadem. There is a reason why the staff turns into a *tannin* in Pharaoh’s court. With that in mind, I take you to **Ezekiel 29:3** which says, “Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great dragon (*tannin*) that lies in the midst of his streams, that says, ‘My Nile is my own; I made it for myself.’” **Psalm 74:13-14** is similar. It says, “You [LORD] divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters (*tannin*) on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan.” In other words, Pharaoh himself is called the *tannin*, the very thing that Moses’ staff becomes.

At this point, Pharaoh summons some of his men to replicate the miracle of Moses. They are called variously “**wise men (*hakem*),**” “**sorcerers (*mekassepim*),**” “**magicians (*hartummim*)**” of Egypt (**Ex 7:11**) who perform “**secret arts.**” These four terms describe in a colorful tapestry the difference between Moses’ miracle and the one replicated by Pharaoh. **Aaron does nothing but throw his staff on the ground.** He doesn’t go into a trance. He doesn’t pronounce some magic spell. He doesn’t conjure up a demon in a séance. He doesn’t cut his body to fill some demon’s bloodlust. But these wise men, men

⁴ **Psalm 74:13-14**, “You divided the sea by your might; you broke the heads of the sea monsters (*tannin*) on the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan (*livyathan*); you gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness.” See also *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* **Gen 1:20**.

⁵ **Isaiah 27:1**, “In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan (*livyathan*) the fleeing serpent (*nachash*), Leviathan (*livyathan*) the twisting serpent (*nachash*), and he will slay the dragon (*tannin*) that is in the sea.”

⁶ This is John Currid’s position in *Ancient Egypt and the OT*, p. 86-87.

⁷ So Peter Enns, *Exodus*, p. 197.

“in the know,” use sorcery. What they do is no mere parlor trick or illusion. Rather it is the dark magic of the famed Book of the Dead learned over countless centuries of acquired occult wisdom which is used to duplicate the miracle. Aaron and the magicians could not be farther apart in how they perform their miracles.

The Scripture says that by their secret arts, “each man cast down his staff, and they became serpents.” Now, some suggest that what is going on here is the same thing you can see today if you walk down the streets of Cairo and watch men put snakes into a state of catalepsy. For example, the *New Bible Dictionary* says, “For this kind of conjuring, it would appear that the Egyptian cobra can be rendered immobile (catalepsy) if pressure be applied to the muscles at the nape of the neck. The serpent must first be charmed, then seized at the neck as shown on several ancient Egyptian scarab-amulets and thus be temporarily immobilized.”⁸ A 19th century Bible scholar named Ernst Hengstenberg once wrote about what he witnessed saying, “When they wish to perform this operation, they spit in the throat of the animal, compel it to shut up its mouth, and lay it down upon the ground. Then, as if in order to give a last command, they lay their hand upon its head, and immediately the serpent, stiff and motionless, falls into a kind of torpor. They wake it up when they wish, seizing it by the tail, and rolling it roughly between the hands. . . [but] at a distance, it is readily mistaken for a cane.”⁹

Some people think that this kind of an argument offers a good explanation for the Egyptian trick. And I do not doubt that there is a kind of good motive behind it, wishing to see the whole of Egyptian religion as a juggler’s show. But to do it, they would actually have us believe that the wise men brought real hypnotized snakes into Pharaoh’s chamber and then dropped them on the ground and that this would have fooled everyone in the room, as if no one would notice what they had done. Now that would be a real magic trick!

I not only think this is a ridiculous interpretation, I think it is a dangerous interpretation on several levels. First, it denies the words of the Scripture which says that they brought in their own *staffs* (not serpents), and that those staffs *became* (*hayah*, the verb “to be”) serpents. Scripture gives no hint that this is an illusion. Rather, it was a real miracle that duplicated the miracle of Aaron and Moses.

Think about what it would imply if these men were only bringing in catatonic serpents to fool people. It would mean that this is what Moses was doing as well, and that God had

⁸ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 716.

⁹ E. W. Hengstenberg, *Egypt and the Books of Moses*, p. 100.

commanded several times for Moses to do a cheap parlor trick in the court of Pharaoh. Can you imagine anything as ludicrous (not to mention damaging to God's credibility) as this? **Wouldn't it imply that the LORD is no more powerful than Doug Henning?** It is shocking how some Christians will go to the wall to uphold the miracles of the plagues and the Red Sea, but will immediately cry out for a naturalistic interpretation when it comes to the Egyptian magicians.

And yet, it seems to me, that we are meant to see what they did here as a mighty power; so that you, dear Christian, might understand what shadowy figure lurks in the darkness just under the water of Egypt. Leviathan's mouth is open and his teeth are sharp and you may not even realize that he is swimming just below. There is a real **serpentine force** capable of fantastic power, including the power to deceive. It is power that you and I cannot even begin to imagine that was leading the Serpent-King Pharaoh and his dark sorcerers in those days. Is this not why the Scripture is so blunt about **witchcraft as being an abomination**, and gives such a permanent punishment to those in Israel who engaged in it? Is it not because these dark forces are real rather than fake?

Or do you suppose that **all of this talk about the devil is but a hoax** to get you to fear that which is not even real in the first place? Do you, like Hollywood, **believe that witchcraft is nothing but a cool and fun pastime** to dabble in now that the stuffy old Puritans no longer rule over our culture? If there *are* spirit forces out there, are you one who thinks that they are nothing but kind, benign, helpful creatures, not the malevolent forces of darkness that seek to destroy our souls as our Christian fathers knew and tried so hard to suppress *for our benefit* so that we might not be harmed by them?

I tell you, **the Scripture has no such pretensions about the demonic spirit world as do today's liberal Christians** who think they can relegate every miracle in the Bible, be they done at God's hand or the hand of a demon, to naturalistic causes. Darwin is laughing in his grave at how unwittingly influenced we have been by his little theory such that everything must occur with a perfectly naturalistic explanation. This story before us is nothing if not a warning against the dangers of witchcraft and sorcery.

I understand not wanting to give Satan any power. It's a safer world to live in. But it is a world that does not exist. It is a world of your own self-deception. It is a world that makes a mockery of the Biblical language of Exodus 7. And it is a world that **minimizes the great battle that is taking place on the pages in front of us**. For, as we know, these magicians were not able to duplicate *every* miracle. In fact, only a few could be

duplicated. And this shows that God's real power is infinitely greater than the very real, though limited, power of Satan and his fiery-serpentine minions.

Jannes and Jambres

I want to tell you a little bit more about the men who cast their rods down before Moses and Aaron. Their names come to us from many Jewish traditions which have been preserved, including at least one book named after them. It is this tradition that Paul remembers in his letter to Timothy. Paul tells Timothy, “Just as **Jannes and Jambres** opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith” (2 Tim 3:8).

The best guess as to what Paul is quoting is the Jewish Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (a targum was a kind of paraphrase of the Scripture) which has for **Exodus 7:11**, “But Pharaoh call the hachems and magicians; and they also, Janis and Jamberes, magicians of Mizraim (that is Egypt), did the same by their burnings of divination.” The Targum refers to them two other times,¹⁰ once in **Exodus 1:15** where Pharaoh tells them his dream and they explain to him that a boy is about to be born who will destroy Israel; and the other in **Num 22:22** where they are identified as the two sons of Balaam.

It seems reasonable that the traditions represented in the Targum begin to contradict themselves (for Balaam was a prophet to Moab and he seems to have been from Syria or Ammon, somewhere far away from Egypt where we are to believe his two sons are now serving).¹¹ Other strange traditions grew up around these two men.¹² But I want you to listen to what these traditions credit as *the source of their power*. In the *Damascus Document* (CD A 5.18-19) found among the Dead Sea Scrolls it says, “Moses and Aaron, by the hand of the prince of lights and **Belial**, with his cunning, raised up Jannes and his brother during the first deliverance of Israel.”¹³

You know who I believe the prince of lights is (Jesus; ala the Angel of the LORD). **Belial** is mentioned by Paul (**2 Cor 6:15**) as a demon opposed to Christ.¹⁴ This ought to show

¹⁰ With different names: Jannis and Jambres (Exodus 1:15), Janis and Jamberes (Ex 7:11), Jannes and Jambres (Num 22:22).

¹¹ See the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*: Balaam's Homeland (and try not to become too nauseated by the source criticism used in the article).

¹² See “**Jannes and Jambres**: The Tradition, in *The OT Pseudepigrapha* vol. 2 (Charlesworth edition), p. 427-30.

¹³ A *Zadokite Fragment* (7:19, Charles' edition) affirms the same, “For aforetime arose Moses and Aaron through the prince of Lights. But Belial raised Jochanneh and his brother with his evil device when the former delivered Israel.”

¹⁴ In the very bizarre book *Testament of Solomon* (25:1ff) we read, “I asked the other demon that had done up from the sea with the pillar: ‘Who are you and what are you called and what is your activity? Because I hear many things about you.’ The demon said: ‘I, O King Solomon, am called Abhezethibou. And at one time I was seated in the first heaven, whose name is Amelouth. I am a fierce, one-winged demon, plotting against every

you that behind the miracle was no magic mirror, but a very demon of hell. And for their ability to conjure the powers of Belial, these two magicians were revered by the Egyptians to be gods themselves.¹⁵

It is fascinating [the way Paul applies Jannes and Jambres to Timothy](#). It is in the same context of those who despise authority that Peter and Jude refer to when they begin to use Jewish tradition in their letters. I tell you, [the spirit of Jannes and Jambres is alive and well in the United States of America](#). There is a sensuality and licentiousness towards the other world being promoted and applauded in every corner of our nation, including many so-called churches. Meanwhile, it mocks to no end anyone that would seek to put the kibosh on their little party, even as Jannes and Jambres did to Moses.¹⁶ These men and women despise the authority of the church and of her God and of the truth, and you must not listen to them or be persuaded by their demonic voices. As Moses, who is a type of the church here, you must stand up with the word of God being obedient to his voice in such times as these.¹⁷ As Paul told Timothy, you must guard the truth that the Holy Spirit has entrusted and not listen to those like Jannes and Jambres who oppose the truth but never arrive at it.¹⁸ This rebellious spirit that is so common in our day is one of the most dangerous spirits around today.

Swallowed Up

For what is taking place today is the same thing that was taking place then. It is the great battle between light and darkness, between good and evil, between Moses and Pharaoh, between Jesus and Satan. Indeed, this whole idea of [God vs. the gods](#) is the central plot of this story. And it has been the central plot of the story since the very beginning when the LORD swore to crush the head of the [serpent](#). Here, in anticipation of that mighty wound dealt out to Satan on the cross, the LORD swallows the Serpent-King's own snakes alive.

The language used here is very interesting and foreshadowing. It says, "[But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs](#)" ([Ex 7:12b](#)). "[Swallowed](#)" is used only here and in [Ex 15:12](#) where it says that the [sea swallows up the Egyptian army](#). In fact, it says "[You stretched](#)

wind under the heavens. I was present when Moses entered to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, hardening his heart. I am he whom Jannes and Jambres, who fought with Moses in Egypt, summoned. I am the one that wrestled against Moses in the wonders and the signs."

¹⁵ [Acts of Pilate 5:1](#), "And there were there Jannes and Jambres, servants of Pharaoh, and they also did not a few of the miracles which Moses did; and the Egyptians took them to be gods—this Jannes and this Jambres. But, since the miracles which they did were not of God, both they are those who believed in them were destroyed."

¹⁶ This obvious implication of Paul's words is confirmed in the Talmud in [Menachoth 85a](#) which says, "As Egypt was reputed to be a land of magic and sorcery these magicians (Johana and Mamre) thus taunted Moses when he performed his wonders before the Pharaoh."

¹⁷ For Moses as a type of the Christian community see the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:869.

¹⁸ See *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*.

out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.” **Who did it swallow?** According to Psalm 74 (which I have already read), it **swallowed the sea monsters**, the *tannin*, the serpents.

So **Terence Fretheim** says of the snake swallowing, “This does not represent Aaron’s superior power to do magical tricks. . . it functions as *a sign* of things to come in a very specific way: the fate of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. . . God is imaged as a fisherman who will catch him and give him to the animals for food. . . The seemingly innocuous reference to snake swallowing is thus an *ominous sign* for Pharaoh: it is a signal of his fate [emphasis mine].”¹⁹

So we have come back at last to this idea of a sign. God told Moses that when he dropped his rod, it would be **a sign to his people**. Now, it becomes **an omen of doom to Pharaoh**. Not all signs are good. But do you think it stops there? No. Rather, it becomes **a sign to the Devil himself**, the serpent of Eden, the Leviathan of Isaiah, the Beast of Revelation. John sees in his vision “what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image . . . standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!’” (**Rev 15:2-3**).

They are singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb, because the Lamb, beloved, has crushed the head of the serpent on the cross. And he will soon plunge him into the deep abyss. He has defanged that slithering old snake, who still roars like a lion. And he has done it with **the very power of God**. How so?

Right Hand of Power

In Exodus 15 it is **God’s right hand** that swallows the Egyptians alive. In **Exodus 7:4** it says, “I will lay my hand on Egypt.” In **7:5** it says, “I will stretch out my hand against Egypt.” Moses sang, “Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy” (**Ex 15:6**). “You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.”

But the Psalmist says, “My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me” (**Ps 63:8**). It says, “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (**Ps 16:11**). It says, “You have given me the

¹⁹ Fretheim, *Exodus*, p. 113-14.

shield of your salvation, and your right hand has supported me, and your gentleness made me great” (Ps 18:35).

The same right hand of God is death to one, but life to the other. It is a baptism into death to Pharaoh, but a baptism into newness of life to the believer. All you do it believe in the good news, child, and in the power of the Son of Man who is now seated above every rule and principality at the right hand of power of God (Luke 22:69; Eph 1:21). This chapter is still about God’s name and of Jesus it says, “When God raised him from the dead, he seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion (that is the angelic/demonic creatures), and **above every name** that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all thing to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

And so therefore, friend, I ask you to believe from this story of the staff turned into a serpent, a story that foretold of Pharaoh’s own demise, and played out in type and shadow the very destruction of the devil, read the sign and believe in Jesus, that he died for you and rose so that you might not perish in the sea or be swallowed up by death forever.²⁰ For the sign of the rod turned into a snake can have either promise of hope or portend of doom, depending on your answer to the gospel that is presented to you.

My prayer for you is one that Isaiah prayed long ago. “Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake, as in days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pieced the dragon? Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep, who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over? And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 51:9-11).

Where of Death is they victory? Where O Death is thy sting?

Death is *swallowed up*, in victory!

²⁰ William Shedd, the great Calvinist of the 19th century had an interesting take on the question of the *Universal Offer of the Atonement* in light of its obviously limited design in application. In that discussion, he uses Jannes and Jambres as examples of those who withstood the truth of the gospel. See Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, p. 751.