

Don't Pack Up Your Troubles

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

As Paul is speaking to Timothy, he mentions these two men by name in an off-hand fashion and expects that Timothy knows exactly who he is talking about. He uses these men as an example of the type of person that Timothy is dealing with. By bringing them up in the conversation, he expects Timothy to understand the context, to realize the similarity, and then to use that experience to gain insight into how to deal with the situation in his own life.

But who are these people?

Although not mentioned by name specifically, tradition tells us that these men first make their appearance in Exodus.

Exodus 7:11 (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.

Jannes and Jambres are the traditional names of Pharaoh's magicians. They were the ones who threw down their own rods and turned them into snakes, just as Aaron had done. Remember that Pharaoh was not a king; he was the manifestation of the Egyptian god Ra on earth. Remember what God said to Moses in Exodus 7:1:

Exodus 7:1 (KJV) And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.

So, Pharaoh, as the god Ra, sent his magicians Jannes and Jambres to speak on his behalf. Moses, as representative of the God Yahweh, sent his brother Aaron to speak on his behalf. God sent his message in terms that the Egyptians could understand. When Aaron threw down his rod and it turned to a snake, then it was up to Jannes and Jambres to make their rods turn

into snakes as well, which they did. But we see in verse 12 that Aaron's snake swallowed up the other snakes; a clear message the Yahweh was more powerful than Ra.

But that is not the opposition that Paul is talking about. When you first go up against your enemy, you expect them to oppose you. There is another story that illustrates this:

A man went out his front porch on a cold winter night. On his porch, he found a snake paralyzed by the cold. The snake had been caught off guard by the cold and, being cold blooded, it was unable to get back to its den in time. The man took pity on the snake and brought it into his house and laid it by the fire. Soon the snake, warmed by the fire, began to move. The snake immediately slithered over to the man and bit him on the leg. The man cried out, "Why did you bite me after I brought you in from the cold?" The snake replied, "You knew I was a snake when you brought me in here."

The lesson from this story is, "Don't be surprised when a snake acts like a snake." It is not counted against Jannes and Jambres when they oppose Moses and Aaron in Pharaoh's court, because that is exactly what they are supposed to do. When a baseball player is traded from one team to another, the new team does not hold a grudge against that player for his previous triumphs over them; that is what he is supposed to do. When the trade is completed, that player is expected to work just as hard for the new team as he did for the old.

Paul experienced this first hand. As a persecutor of Christians, there was no one more fervent. Once Paul became a believer, however, there was no one more fervent in his belief that Paul. The greatest anti-Christian became one of the greatest Christians of all time. Likewise, it is not the actions of Jannes and Jambres while under the employ of Pharaoh that Paul is speaking about, it is their actions later.

Exodus 8:16-19 (KJV)

16 And the Lord said unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Stretch out thy rod, and smite the dust of the land, that it may become lice throughout all the land of Egypt. **17** And they did so; for Aaron stretched out his hand with his rod,

and smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice throughout all the land of Egypt. **18** 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. **19** Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh, This is the finger of God: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he hearkened not unto them; as the Lord had said.

Once again the magicians of Pharaoh, Jannes, and Jambres, make an appearance in the Biblical text. Note the change in the magicians from the last time we saw them. Whereas the last time they managed to cast down their rods and make snakes out of them, here they attempt to reproduce Aaron's actions and fail. Because of their failure they announce to Pharaoh that "This is the finger of God." But as Pharaoh's magicians, he was god.

The seemingly simple statement by these magicians shows that there was a change taking place in them. It appears that they may be having doubts about the deity of their ruler. To boldly announce to him that, "These lice come from God and you are just a man," is no small act on their part. The Bible lets us see the conversion of Jannes and Jambres from whole-hearted followers of Pharaoh and Ra into followers of Moses and Yahweh. The first sign of doubt on their part occurs here when they are unable to make lice attack the Jews just as it attacks the Egyptians. They throw it back up into Pharaoh's face and say, "If you were really a god you could give us the power to do this."

They start out "knowing" the truth, but as time goes on they begin to see cracks in the truth they once believed. They begin to see that these crazy people do seem to be able to lay hands on the sick and they recover. They begin to think that maybe there is something to these people after all. They look at the lives of the "pop-tarts" and think, "Is there really where I want to wind up?"

Exodus 9:10-11 (KJV)

10 And they took ashes of the furnace, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses sprinkled it up toward heaven; and it became a boil breaking forth with blains upon man, and upon beast. **11** And the magicians could not

stand before Moses because of the boils; for the boil was upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians.

Modern scholars look at the plague on the cattle and the boils on the people and see the disease Anthrax. Anthrax is often present in the soil. Occasionally it is picked up by cattle as they walk in the dirt and it flares up into the disease. Although the Bible does not say so explicitly, it may be that the Egyptians burned the diseased animals. That would explain why Moses could take the ashes from the furnace, which still contained the Anthrax spores, throw it up into the air and spread the disease to Pharaoh's court. All of this is conjecture, however.

What the Bible does tell, us, however, is that Jannes and Jambres were unable to oppose Moses and Aaron. So, the great and powerful magicians of Pharaoh's court go from being able to reproduce Aaron's miracles, to attempting to reproduce the lice and fail, to being incapacitated by the boils.

If you are lucky, your false gods will fail you. If your gods seem to have power, then you will continue to follow them. If they become impotent, however, then you are forced to confront them. If the alcohol makes you popular and part of the "in" crowd, then there is no reason to stop drinking. When you realize that the alcohol is destroying you and your family, then you must confront it.

The same is true of drugs, your job, your popularity at school; anything that separates you from God. When the power you thought it had is gone and you're left on your bed covered with boils, then you are forced to reevaluate your loyalty.

Some people never get lucky enough to be abandoned by their false gods.

There is a quote that says,

"Everyone lives for what they believe. Since everyone eventually dies, then everyone also dies for what they believe. The sad part is that most people don't believe in very much."

Some people never ask much of their false gods, whatever those gods might be. Hence they are never abandoned by those gods. The lucky ones find out that their allegiance is misdirected and are able to be saved before they die. Jannes and Jambres were lucky in that they found out that Pharaoh was not God.

Exodus 12:38 (KJV) And a mixed multitude went up also with them; and flocks, and herds, even very much cattle.

Note the term, “mixed multitude,” in this verse. This seems to imply that in addition to the Jewish people who left Egypt, that there were several non-Jews that came along as well. The miracles that God wrought on the Egyptians made believers out of several of the Egyptians. Although the Bible does not say so explicitly, the tradition tells us that Jannes and Jambres, formerly of Pharaoh’s court, were among those in the mixed multitude following Moses.

So far I have been highlighting the conversion of Jannes and Jambres from followers of Ra to followers of Yahweh. Nothing in this story, however, implies that they had done anything that Paul would feel a need to warn Timothy about. So, we need to keep reading to find out what Paul is saying to Timothy.

Exodus 32:1 (KJV) And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

In this story, the Israelites have been traveling through the desert for some time. They have seen the Red Sea parted, they have seen manna from Heaven. Aaron himself had lunch with God in chapter 24:

Exodus 24:9-11 (KJV)

9 Then went up Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel: **10** And they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of

heaven in his clearness. **11 And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.**

So, Aaron had seen God. He knew what he looked like. He had a personal experience. That is why it is so surprising that Aaron would be taken in by these people in chapter 32. Aaron made the same mistake that many people make; he failed to wait upon the Lord. Aaron got impatient waiting on the Lord. The people got restless.

Military commanders know that the worst thing you can do with your troops is nothing. If your troops have no tasks to perform, discipline begins to break down. The people get fat and lazy. Soldiers will begin to fight with each other. This is dangerous because if the soldiers do not trust each other, then they will not fight the enemy as a unit. If the army is fighting itself, then it cannot unite to defeat an enemy.

In British Isles, there is a wall that goes all the way across the island called Hadrian's Wall. Some scholars think that the Roman commanders had their soldiers build this wall simply to keep them busy. The Roman soldiers were out far away from their leaders in Rome. It would have been easy for the soldiers to become lazy and begin to fight amongst themselves. By having them build a wall, the leaders kept the soldiers busy and disciplined.

Aaron should have built a wall.

Instead, Aaron allowed the people to start talking and surmising. They got restless. What if Moses never comes back? Why are we here? I've been a bricklayer all my life, why am I in the desert? Per tradition, it was this same Jannes and Jambres who eventually led the mob that convinced Aaron to make a calf. Jannes and Jambres, the former chief magicians of Pharaoh's court, convinced everyone that they had an answer. They would draw upon their vast experience as messengers for the divine to lead the people. They knew how gods liked to be treated, so they would show the people how to do it.

This is the reference that Paul is making in 2 Timothy 3:8. He is speaking to Timothy as a leader of God's people. He is saying, "Don't let these people undermine your leadership."

Moses took the golden calf, ground it to powder, sprinkled it on the water, and made the people drink it. Why? Because the people considered the calf sacred. If he had simply spread the gold on the ground, then some people may have transferred their allegiance to the ground. They would have worshiped the ground, refused to walk on the ground, prayed to the ground. By putting the calf into the drinking water, however, he forced everyone to take the "sacred" calf into their mouth. Just as Aaron's snake swallowed the snakes in Pharaoh's court, so the people swallowed the calf that they had made. They were forced to acknowledge that the sacred calf was powerless.

The problem with Jannes and Jambres is that they did not leave their old ways of thinking and working behind. They latched on to the people of God, but they did not leave their old pagan ways behind. They kept trying to bring the ways and methods of Pharaoh's court into the church.

"Do you know who I am?"

"Do you know what I do for a living?"

"Your pastor is nothing but an ignorant hick. I used to do thus and so."

"Just let me onto the church board and I will really straighten this place out."

The trades people that left Egypt were eventually called upon to make great things for God. The silversmiths made the rings that held the tabernacle together. The goldsmiths make the Ark of the Covenant. God had a job in mind for everyone. Everyone was eventually able to use their God-given skills for the Kingdom.

The problem is not that the goldsmiths wanted to make something for God, it is that they did not wait for God to give them the plans. They took it upon

themselves to decide what God needed based on their own experience and vision. They knew how to make articles of gold for Pharaoh, so they set out to make Pharaonic items for God.

There is an old song from World War I that goes, “Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag and smile, smile, smile.”

The trouble with packing up your troubles is that you wind up carrying them around with you. Don’t pack up your troubles, throw them on the trash heap.

All of us are like Jannes and Jambres in that we have all gone through a process of coming to the knowledge of the truth. The problem arises when we have failed to throw off the “old man.” We wind up carrying around this prideful, lustful person we used to be. That man keeps trying to wake up and tell God how he should be doing things.

Each of us leaves the “Egypt” of our old selves. If we are not careful, however, we will take with us the “mixed multitude” of sins and pride. That mixed multitude is like a seed that will always be looking for an opportunity to spring up. As Paul says,

2 Timothy 3:9 (KJV) But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as their's also was.

So just as the pride of Jannes and Jambres was eventually exposed in the matter of the golden calf, so will your troubles be exposed. It is incumbent upon each of us to sweep the cobwebs of our mind. To constantly be on the lookout for things in our life that are contrary to the ways of God.

I spent some time yesterday cleaning out my garage. Every time I do this I find myself wondering why I kept some of these things. Some of them I have moved from house to house. In one box were some old shoes. A mouse had decided that the shoes were much more comfortable than a hole in the ground, so it turned the shoes into a one-bedroom condo for itself.

If I had given the shoes away, then someone could have worn them. They could have done someone some good. Instead, they are trash. I thought they were valuable, but now they are nothing but a potential source of disease to me.

Paul tells us that Baptism is like our death, burial, and resurrection. Our old man died, was buried in the water, and our new man rose again. Too many of us keep that old man propped up in the corner. We keep carrying around the sins, lusts, and pride of our past. We carry this mixed multitude with us. If you want to store anything, store up your treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not corrupt. Purge yourself from all the unclean things of this earth. Purge your pride. Forget who you think you are; become who God thinks you are.