

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



The staff of God

From high up in his private chamber, Pharaoh watched his son playing in the palace courtyard below. Then his gaze extended far out into the distance — over all of the buildings, over all of the land that belonged to Egypt. "Some day, dear son," he thought, "this will all belong to you. It is your birthright, as it is mine as the king of Egypt."

Pharaoh turned now from the window, his face filled with great satisfaction. He walked over to the full-length mirror and regarded himself. His clothing had been fashioned with the utmost care from the finest silk and linen to be found anywhere in the world. Today, even the golden cobra that encircled his crown had eyes gleaming with precious stones. "Ah, it becomes me," he said, smiling for an instant at his own image.

Pharaoh strode confidently into the grand ballroom and positioned himself on his throne. A servant rushed to wait on him. "Sir," the servant asked, not daring to raise his eyes in the presence of the king, "what may I do for you?"

"I should like my son brought here to me," Pharaoh replied, not bothering to turn his head.

When the servant appeared again with the young boy, Pharaoh motioned for him to be seated directly next to him. "Today, my son, I want you to observe your father,

for someday you shall rule all of Egypt from this very seat."

The boy seemed to ponder this information from his father for a few moments. Then he looked up at his father and said, "Are the court magicians, Jannes and Jambres, here today?"

"Yes, I think so," Pharaoh replied. "Perhaps later I shall ask them to perform for you. It would amuse the gods, too. Yes, that would be lovely!"

Above everything else in his entire kingdom, Pharaoh wanted to please the gods. For after he died, Pharaoh believed, he would join these gods in another life, and he wanted to be welcomed into a proper place.

Just then, another servant looking somewhat dismayed, came through the ballroom doors and approached the throne. He seemed reluctant to speak, but finally, prompted by Pharaoh's long questioning look, he said, "Your highness, I beg your pardon for bothering you with this trivial matter. But those two men that were here to see you yesterday are back again. I did try to send them away, but they demand to see you."

"You mean those two disagreeable brothers, the ones who wanted me to release the Hebrew slaves?" Pharaoh's expression was filled with contempt. "How dare they come back here again. No, I will not see them!"

A commotion could be heard coming from outside the ballroom doors and, despite a servant's attempt to stop them,

Moses and Aaron burst into the room and came to stand directly before Pharaoh.

Pharaoh glared at them both and said, "I have not changed my mind — nor do I intend to — if that is why you have come. I will not agree to any of your ridiculous ideas or, should I say, of the ideas of some god I have never heard of!"

Without a moment's hesitation, Moses replied, "We have come back to show you who our God is. By this miracle, you will indeed know His great power." Then Moses motioned to Aaron, saying, "Throw my staff to the ground!" And immediately, the rod became a serpent.

Pharaoh stood up, his face red with anger and yelled, "Tell Jannes and Jambres to come here at once! We'll see whose god is more powerful."

The two court magicians came in and bowed low to Pharaoh. Then seeing the serpent, they both threw their staffs to the ground and instantly they became serpents, too.

Pharaoh laughed mockingly at Moses and Aaron. His son, too, stood clapping his hands excitedly.

"So it's a contest you seek, Pharaoh?" Moses asked persistently. "The God of the Hebrews is the one true God. And He is more powerful than any false gods created by your sorcery!"

No sooner had Moses said this to Pharaoh, that the serpent that had come from his staff rose up and devoured both of the serpents of Jannes and Jambres.

"Get out of here!" Pharaoh exploded in rage. "I don't care how many miracles your god performs. I will never let my Hebrew slaves leave Egypt. Do you hear me? Never!"

Moses and Aaron left the palace, but they knew that they would return yet again

to the stubborn king. All of this had occurred just as God had predicted to Moses. Both the Egyptians and Hebrews would witness many more miracles in the land and, in this way, come to know the one, true God.

For discussion:

1. Pharaoh and the Egyptian people worshipped many false gods. What false gods do people worship today?
2. The serpents conjured by the magicians symbolized false gods. Yet when Moses' staff was transformed into a serpent by God, it was a sign that God was with the Hebrews and that His power was greater than any magic. What does the Sign of the Cross symbolize for us?

For further reading:

1. The story of Moses and the serpents is found in Exodus, Chapter 7:1-14.
2. Another time when Moses used a serpent and a staff, the serpent symbolized God's healing power. This story is found in Numbers, Chapter 21:4-9. Today, a staff encircled by two serpents is used as a symbol of healing by physicians. The physicians' symbol is called a *caduceus*. A single serpent wound around a staff and superimposed on the symbol for the United Nations designates the World Health Organization. To learn more about such symbols, read *Signs and Symbols Around the World*, by Elizabeth S. Helfman.



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