

Who Were Jannes And Jambres?

Those Who Oppose God

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Please turn to II Timothy chapter 3. Today I want to talk about two personages of whom we very seldom speak, Jannes and Jambres. Paul talks about these. He says they resisted the truth, and he says that their sin ultimately will become manifest to everyone. Who were Jannes and Jambres?

II Timothy 3:1-5 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

And Paul goes on then to explain why these last times will be this way, because he says of the character of people who are living that way.

We will skip down to verse 8. Paul here compares the sort of people that we just described to Jannes and Jambres.

II Timothy 3:8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

Now if you were to search a concordance, you would find very quickly that the names Jannes and Jambres do not appear anywhere else in Scripture. They are never talked about in Scripture, but Paul drops their names here almost offhandedly, as if everybody knew who they were. Presumably Timothy knew who they were. Paul takes no space at all to tell us who these

two contemporaries of Moses actually were. And we know the story of Korah, we know the story of a whole bunch of other rebels. But who were Jannes and Jambres, these resisters of the truth?

Concerning them, the old church followed the Jewish tradition cited in the Targum or the commentary by Jonathan Ben Uzziel. It is still extant today. It was written probably just before or after Christ, perhaps in Christ's time. And in this commentary on Exodus 7, Ben Uzziel states that Jannes and Jambres were magicians in Pharaoh's court, and that they were the ones who opposed Moses there. And until the early 1990s there was no further evidence whatsoever about their identity. That was all there was.

In 1994, another witness did appear. An antiquity expert at the University of Toronto compiled a number of literary fragments. Now these were from a number of different languages. They were of different ages. They were from different libraries. He compiled a group of fragments that he considered to be a part of a single book on Jannes and Jambres. It appears that a fictionalized account (and it is fictionalized) account of these two brothers appeared in a book, a scroll called "The Book of Jannes and Jambres" sometime during Christ's lifetime, maybe just a little bit after.

What we have today through the scholar's efforts is incomplete. All we have is some pieces in the middle. We do not have the end of the book. We do not have the beginning of it, but we do have a few pieces in the middle.

Origen, and he was what the Catholics would call a church father, he lived in the third century AD, he mentions this particular book, as do six other writers of antiquity. So it appears that the book was well known in the early centuries of this era. According to this book, Jannes and Jambres have quite a pedigree. They are, according to the book, the sons of Balaam and the grandsons of Pethor, and he was a priest of the Egyptian bull god Apis. They were also magicians in Pharaoh's court at Memphis. With their mother they lived in a palace, in this very palatial estate called a paradise. The magicians' lifestyle is highly hedonistic. They discuss a lot of sexual immorality, that they are very interested in sexual immorality. It fills this book. They are both support the abrogation of marriage.

Now, Jannes seems to be the leader. He seems to be of the two, the elder brother. He becomes quite ill early in the narrative. It appears that he was stricken with leprosy. And just after the defeat of Egypt at the Red Sea, he dies, though not from this disease, but violently as if he was struck by fire from heaven, according to this narrative. And shortly thereafter, his mother dies violently as well.

Jambres was then the younger brother. He takes over as head magician in the court, and he conjures up the ghost of Jannes from Hades, who complains of his torments. He admits his wrongdoing, and he warns his brother to repent before it is too late. And that is the end of the fragments. We do not know anything after that.

Now it is clear, of course, that this book is not inspired by God. It was probably written by a Hellenized Jew in Egypt, someone who had become thoroughly infected with Greek false doctrines of the immortality of the soul, the existence of Hades, you know, and all this kind of stuff. Of course, we do not know whether Paul had read the book or a precursor to it, or simply that he knew the story because it was so popular in his day. We certainly would guess that Paul was aware of Ben Uzziel's commentary.

Of course, we understand that the book of Jannes and Jambres is merely a fictionalized account of two real personages. But like many fictional accounts, it probably has a germ of truth in it. It probably attempts to show the real character of these two people, these two brothers, because what shines through this extant narrative that I just kind of went through very quickly with you is the two brothers' predominant character trait.

And that simply is that it displays their stubbornness. It shows their obstinacy, the obduracy of these two brothers. According to the narrative, for example, Jannes had knowledge of the true God and was warned by Him to repent, but he absolutely refused to do so. He set his jaw against God. He acted in determined rebellion against God. He did not act in ignorance.

For example, early in the narrative, Jannes' mother has a dream of the impending ruin of Egypt, and later an angel comes down and he cuts one of the main trees down, an oak tree, in this paradise. Well, how did Jannes

respond to all this? Well, not by turning to God. What he does is he uselessly resists God by building a wall around this paradise as if that is going to protect him from God. At the second point, just shortly after this, Jannes is supernaturally struck with leprosy. He still refuses to repent.

And the third point, Jannes recognizes Moses to be the servant of God, and he admits that Moses is endowed with divine power. He tells Pharaoh this, and yet according to the narrative, he defiantly asserts that it is this relationship, this relationship between God and Moses, that is the very reason for his opposition to Moses. And immediately after he tells Pharaoh that Moses is God's servant, Jannes attempts to kill Moses.

Another example throughout the narrative, there is various natural omens. There is astronomical things that are happening in the skies, and they all signal coming disaster, and Jannes in the narrative understands what these are, but he refuses to repent.

He understands, for instance, that Egypt faces disaster at the Red Sea and in the narrative, he refuses to join Pharaoh in the pursuit of the children of Israel. He warns his brother not to participate in this struggle. Yet even this knowledge does not lead him to repent at all. And as a final point, on his deathbed, he refuses to repent. But appoints Jambres as his successor, and there he commissions him to continue the war against God.

Now Jambres, after the death of his brother, seems to be just as obdurate, walking the same rebellious path as his brother. His name, by the way, is related to the same Hebrew root that is in the noun Mamre. You will remember in Genesis 14:13, that name appears. Mamre was an Amorite, and it is related to the Hebrew root that means to agitate or to rebel. That is Jambres.

Jambres, having witnessed all the terrible events of the Exodus, the plagues and the destruction, as well as having witnessed the violent death of his brother and of his mother, refuses to turn from his magic. Instead, as I mentioned before, he actually goes as far as to call up Jannes from the dead for guidance.

He apparently never heeds his brother's advice to repent before it is too late. For Paul there in II Timothy uses the plural. He says "as *theirs* also was." The plural referring to the two brothers. He does not distinguish between the end of Jannes and Jambres. It appears that Jambres never repents but follows in the footsteps of his brother.

Paul's comments in II Timothy 3, which we looked at earlier, state that the wicked people of these last days, these men of corrupt minds, as Paul says there, he says they will progress no further. That is, their efforts to blot out God's name. Their efforts to prove that God is dead, as they say, will prove just as futile as the efforts of the Egyptian magicians to stop God from destroying Egypt. Those magicians were totally unable to stave off disaster for Egypt. All of Pharaoh's soldiers, all of his might was unable to do so.

No matter what their situation in life, brethren, whether they are leaders, whether they are the rank and file, those today who resist the truth will be just as powerless to stop God from accomplishing His purposes.

Interestingly, Paul sees a second likeness between the Egyptian magicians and those today who are disapproved concerning the faith, as Paul says. Paul asserts that their folly will be manifest to all. The utter desolation of Egypt in the wake of the plagues displayed the power of God for everyone to see. It is clear from the Scriptures that the nations of the world trembled when they saw God successfully destroy, and rather quickly destroy, the most powerful nation of its day.

In like manner, God's utter destruction of this present evil age, which *will* come, it will show everyone that man's way is totally inadequate to bring peace and prosperity. Man's government, and more than that, his whole way of life, what Mr. Armstrong used to call the get way of life, will come to be recognized by everyone in the final day as a total failure.

Jannes and Jambres died millennia ago. They obviously are not in Hades. But the voice of these two witnesses sounds loud and clear to all today who have ears. Their voice warns us that there will be in these last days obstinate

sinner who knows of God but who purposefully and who resolutely set their jaw against Him. They know the truth, but they resist the truth with all their might.

To follow God is ultimately to gain freedom from the slavery of sin and death, just as the children of Israel gained freedom from their hard service. But to resist God, brethren, is to progress no further than to the Lake of Fire. Be sure your sin will find you out.