

In front of Pharaoh Amenhotep II stood Moses and Aaron. This presumptuous pair had just told Pharaoh that he must allow all his Hebrew slaves to go and worship their God in the desert. They were claiming that their God, Yahweh, had commanded they do this!

Amenhotep scoffed at their declaration and their God. He then challenged them to perform a miracle to prove their claim was true. So Aaron threw his staff on the ground, and it turned into a snake before Pharaoh. The battle was on!

Amenhotep summoned his magicians. He ordered them to show that the gods of Egypt were more powerful than the Hebrew's God by performing a greater sign than Aaron's. Pharaoh's magicians smoked opium and petitioned their gods to act, and the Egyptian gods turned the magicians' staffs into snakes also. It appeared they had won the day, but then Aaron's staff devoured all the others.

*Pharaoh called the wise men and sorcerers [pharmakos]—the magicians [epano] of Egypt, and they also did the same thing by their occult practices [pharmakia]. Each one threw down his staff, and it became a serpent. But Aaron's staff swallowed their staffs. However, Pharaoh's heart hardened, and he did not listen to them.*

*—Exodus 7:11-13 (HCSB)*

The next morning Moses and Aaron went to Amenhotep again. They told him that if he would not let them go worship Yahweh, he would turn the Nile into blood. Amenhotep scoffed again! Hapi, the god of the Nile, was one of the most revered gods in Egypt. Surely the God of these slaves could not thwart the god of the Nile!

*But when Aaron raised his staff and struck the river, “all the water in the Nile was turned to blood. The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad the Egyptians could not drink water from it.*

*—Exodus 7:20-21 (HCSB)*

Amenhotep’s magicians now had to respond to this amazing miracle. They smoked opium and called out in desperation to their gods, and the Egyptian gods were able to turn a little water into blood also. When they did, Pharaoh’s resolve returned. He refused to let his slaves go worship their God, so Yahweh next sent a plague of frogs upon Egypt.

*Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, [and] frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians [epano] did the same thing by their occult practices [pharmakia] and brought frogs up onto the land of Egypt.*

*—Exodus 8:6-7 (HCSB)*

Pharaoh’s magicians again used opium to call upon their gods, but they brought up more frogs! Amenhotep, weary of all the frogs, finally said he would let the Hebrews go worship, but once the frogs were gone he refused to grant their request. So Yahweh quickly brought another plague on Egypt:

*Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and when he struck the dust of the earth, gnats were on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats throughout the land of Egypt. The magicians [epano] tried to produce gnats using their occult practices [pharmakia], but they could not. . . . ‘This is the finger of God,’ the magicians [epano] said to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh’s heart hardened, and he would not listen to them.*

*—Exodus 8:17-19 (HCSB)*

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## Drug Use in the Law

### Drug Use in Exodus

**T**he first references to drug use in the Septuagint appear in the book of Exodus, in verses 7:11, 7:22, 8:7, 8:18, 8:19, and 9:11. Drugs played an important role in the confrontations between Moses and Pharaoh.

The first verse, 7:11, is the only verse that contains all three of the words *pharmakia*, *pharmakos*, and *epano*, and it shows us a great deal:

Pharaoh called the wise men and sorcerers [pharmakos]—the magicians [epano] of Egypt, and they also did the same thing by their occult practices [pharmakia].

—Exodus 7:11 HCSB

First we see the word *pharmakos* used to refer to the sorcerers Pharaoh summoned to his court. This tells us they were drug-using magicians specifically. Next we see the broader term for magician, *epano*, used to refer to this group of “wise men and pharmakos.” This tells us that *epano* can, and in this instance does, refer to drug-using magicians. Exodus 7:11 then states that Pharaoh’s magicians used *pharmakia* to mimic God’s miracle of turning Aaron’s staff into a serpent. This tells us that they used drugs in the ritual magic they performed at that time. It also confirms that *epano* can refer to those who practice magic with drugs.

The magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron used drugs. The Bible gives the names of two of them—Jannes and Jambres—but it gives no

information about the rituals they performed or the drugs they used.<sup>1</sup> They were most likely using opium, which was cultivated in Mesopotamia at that time, and like most magicians they probably took it just before they called upon their gods.

Once Jannes and Jambres contacted their gods, they petitioned them to answer the challenge posed by the God of Moses and Aaron. Aaron had thrown down his staff, and it had become a serpent. The Egyptian gods responded by performing the same sign. Exodus 7:11 states the Egyptian magicians “did the same thing” with their pharmakia. The next verse further clarifies what happened:

Each one threw down his staff, and it became a serpent.

—Exodus 7:12 HCSB

These two verses tell us it was not by sleight-of-hand that Pharaoh’s magicians did these things. Jannes and Jambres did not practice illusory magic. They practiced occult magic. They did not charm snakes into becoming stiff like rods and then release them, as some teach. The magicians of Pharaoh’s court petitioned their gods to bring supernatural power to bear on an inanimate object just as the God of Moses and Aaron had. They did the same thing by their occult practices, and their staffs became serpents also.

### ***The Bloody Nile***

The next reference to drug use is in Exodus 7:22. In this verse we find almost the exact same phrase as in 7:11. The only difference is, during this encounter the Egyptian magicians practiced pharmakia to get their gods to respond to the Lord’s turning the Nile into blood:

(19) The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron: Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over their rivers, canals, ponds, and all their water reservoirs—and they will become blood. There will be blood throughout the land of Egypt, even in wooden and stone containers.”

(20) Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded; in the sight of Pharaoh and his officials, he raised the staff and struck the water in the Nile, and all the water in the Nile was turned to blood. (21) The fish in the Nile died, and the river smelled so bad the Egyptians could not drink water from it. There was blood throughout the land of Egypt.

(22) But the magicians [epano] of Egypt did the same thing by their occult practices [pharmakia]. So Pharaoh's heart hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

—Exodus 7:19–22 HCSB

In 7:22 *epano* is again used to refer to magicians who petition their gods via *pharmakia*, and once again the gods of Egypt did the same thing the God of Aaron had done. The Egyptian magicians did not drop red dye into waterpots, as some have suggested. They got their gods to turn a small amount of water into blood.\*

### ***The Plague of Frogs***

In Exodus 8:7 we read the phrase “the magicians did the same thing by their occult practices” one more time. This time it was in response to the plague of frogs:

(1) Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and tell him: This is what Yahweh says: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. (2) But if you refuse to let them go, then I will plague all your territory with frogs. (3) The Nile will swarm with frogs; they will come up and go into your palace, into your bedroom and on your bed, into the houses of your officials and your people, and into your ovens and kneading bowls. (4) The frogs will come up on you, your people, and all your officials.”

(5) The LORD then said to Moses, “Tell Aaron: Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, canals, and ponds, and cause the frogs to come up onto the land of Egypt.” (6) When Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. (7) But the magicians [epano] did the same thing by their occult practices [pharmakia] and brought frogs up onto the land of Egypt.

—Exodus 8:1–7 HCSB

The Egyptian magicians again used drugs in the ritual magic they performed to get their gods to imitate a miracle done by the God of the Bible. The only difference was this time it involved frogs.

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\* The only clean water to be found was in the ground, along the banks of the Nile (Exodus 7:19, 24). The magicians had to first get water from there and then turn that into blood. Thus the quantity they changed was much, much smaller.

***The Big Picture***

Before we look at the remaining references to the use of drugs in the book of Exodus, we need to grasp the larger meaning and implications of these confrontations between Moses—the man sent by God to free the Hebrews, and Pharaoh—the man bent on keeping them in slavery. Ultimately, this section of Exodus is a picture of the freedom from slavery to sin that the God of the Bible now offers all people through his Messiah, but at the time it was about whose deity was greater.

When Moses first approached Amenhotep, he told Pharaoh that Yahweh—the LORD—the God of the Hebrews, had commanded them to go into the desert and worship him. Pharaoh didn't know about Yahweh, however, and was not about to let them go:

Moses and Aaron went in and said to Pharaoh, "This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says: Let My people go, so that they may hold a festival for Me in the wilderness."

But Pharaoh responded, "Who is Yahweh that I should obey Him by letting Israel go? I do not know anything about Yahweh, and besides, I will not let Israel go."

Then they answered, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Please let us go on a three-day trip into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to Yahweh our God, or else He may strike us with plague or sword."

—Exodus 5:1–3 HCSB

Moses had met Yahweh at the burning bush before he returned to Egypt,<sup>2</sup> but Amenhotep didn't know of Yahweh yet, and he certainly didn't respect him. In Pharaoh's mind there was no way that the God of his Hebrew slaves could be greater than the hundreds of gods worshipped by the Egyptians. If Yahweh was greater, then why were they slaves?

It wasn't until the frogs were upon Pharaoh that he acknowledged Yahweh, and he only did so because he wanted the plague to end:

Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Ask Yahweh to remove the frogs from me and my people. Then I will let the people go and they can sacrifice to Yahweh."

—Exodus 8:8 HCSB

As soon as the frogs were gone, Amenhotep's defiance returned:

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When Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would not listen to them.

—Exodus 8:15 HCSB

Perhaps you've read this part of Exodus before and marveled at Pharaoh's obstinacy. His behavior is easier to understand when you consider a few aspects of the backstory.

First, Pharaoh was himself considered a god, the physical embodiment of Osiris, Lord of the Underworld. Pharaoh was also the undisputed supreme ruler of Egypt. Therefore, if Amenhotep were to acknowledge the supremacy of Yahweh, he would be acknowledging his own inferiority and the inferiority of all the other gods of Egypt as well. Egyptian society was very much tied up with their many gods. If Pharaoh had done this, Egyptian civilization would have been turned upside down. If Yahweh proved himself superior to the Egyptians' gods, the Egyptians would have to set the Hebrews free and worship Yahweh as well. How would they function without the Hebrews building their buildings and growing their crops?<sup>3</sup> What would happen to Pharaoh? To his family? To his court?

Amenhotep already had plenty of motivation to deny Moses and Aaron's request, and when Jannes and Jambres succeeded in imitating the first two plagues, it further strengthened his resolve. Yahweh himself was strengthening Pharaoh's resistance as well, in order to bring the Hebrews out of Egypt forever.<sup>4</sup> So it was for all these reasons that Amenhotep stubbornly refused to acknowledge the clear message behind the plagues—that Yahweh, the God of Pharaoh's slaves, is greater than the gods of Egypt.

Yahweh sent ten plagues on Egypt, and each one was a confrontation with an Egyptian god.<sup>5</sup> For example: The Egyptians worshipped Hapi, the god of the Nile, for the aquatic life and fertility of soil that he supposedly brought. Hapi was dramatically dethroned when Yahweh turned the Nile into blood.<sup>†</sup> Heqet, the Egyptian goddess of childbirth, was often depicted as a woman with a frog's head. Yahweh showed his dominion over Heqet with the plague of frogs. The Egyptians also worshipped the bull-god Apis, whom they believed brought fertility to livestock. Apis was humiliated in the fifth plague when all

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<sup>†</sup> This was a fitting first plague. Amenhotep's predecessor Thutmose I had commanded that all newborn Hebrew males be sacrificed to Hapi (Exodus 1:22), and Moses would have met this fate had he not been found by Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:1–10). The Nile, in Yahweh's eyes, was already full of blood.

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the Egyptians' livestock died.<sup>6</sup> Their venerated sun-god Ra was put to shame when Yahweh covered the land with darkness for three days.<sup>7</sup>

The plagues Yahweh unleashed upon Egypt were all signs of his superiority. Amenhotep and his magicians surely understood this, but just in case they were missing the point, Yahweh had Moses make it clear to them after the sixth plague:

The Lord said to Moses, "Get up early in the morning and present yourself to Pharaoh. Tell him: This is what Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews says: Let My people go, so that they may worship Me. Otherwise, I am going to send all My plagues against you, your officials, and your people. Then you will know there is no one like Me in all the earth."

—Exodus 9:13–14 HCSB

The message behind each plague was "there is no god like Yahweh," but Amenhotep never got the message. The initial sign of Aaron's staff swallowing up the magicians' staffs was proof of the superiority of the God of the Hebrews as well. It was also an omen: a sign of what would soon take place.

A staff is a symbol of authority and power. Aaron's staff became a serpent in front of Pharaoh. This was a sign that Yahweh was going to manifest his dominion and power in a deadly way. The magicians' staffs represented the power and authority of the Egyptians' gods. They were able to perform the same miracle, but when Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs it foreshadowed Yahweh swallowing up the gods of Egypt.<sup>8</sup>

Pagans and occultists have always looked for knowledge of the future in signs and omens. Jannes and Jambres had to have known that this first encounter did not bode well.

The Egyptian gods had power, but the Egyptian magicians could only imitate the things done by Yahweh, and they were only able to increase the plagues. They were not able to use their pharmakia to undo them. If Jannes and Jambres had been able to turn the Nile back into clean water, or if they had been able to send the frogs back into the river, they would have shown that their gods were greater than Yahweh. This is surely what they wanted to happen, but it didn't happen. Pharaoh's magicians finally accepted the implication of their impotence after Yahweh sent the plague of gnats.

### ***The Plague of Gnats***

The next references to *pharmakia* and *epano* in the Septuagint are found in Exodus 8:18–19. The Bible makes it clear that the magic performed to imitate Yahweh's third plague included the use of drugs:

(16) Then the Lord said to Moses, "Tell Aaron: Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, and it will become gnats throughout the land of Egypt." (17) And they did this. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and when he struck the dust of the earth, gnats were on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats throughout the land of Egypt. (18) The magicians [*epano*] tried to produce gnats using their occult practices [*pharmakia*], but they could not. The gnats remained on man and beast.

(19) "This is the finger of God," the magicians [*epano*] said to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh's heart hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

—Exodus 8:16-19 HCSB

The Egyptian magicians practiced *pharmakia* once again, but this time their gods could not imitate the miracle Yahweh performed. They could not create any gnats, nor could they send the ones that were there away. At this point the magicians realized they had come up against God, but Pharaoh refused to accept it.

Yes, Pharaoh was in denial.

### ***The Plague of Boils***

The next two references to drug users in the Old Testament are found in Exodus 9:11. *Pharmakos* appears twice in this verse, which states that during the plague of boils the magicians had boils just like everyone else:

(8) Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of furnace soot, and Moses is to throw it toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh. (9) It will become fine dust over the entire land of Egypt. It will become festering boils on man and beast throughout the land of Egypt." (10) So they took furnace soot and stood before Pharaoh. Moses threw it toward heaven, and it became festering boils on man and beast. (11) The magicians [*pharmakos*] could not stand before Moses because of the

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boils, for the boils were on the magicians [pharmakos] as well as on all the Egyptians.

—Exodus 9:8–11 HCSB

The Egyptian drug-magicians were not immune to the plagues Yahweh was sending. Why does the Bible mention this? It is yet another sign of the superiority of Yahweh over the gods of Egypt.

Occult magicians often perform magic for their own protection. They typically do so for protection from evil spirits, other magicians, and misfortune. Given what was happening in Egypt at the time, Jannes and Jambres no doubt performed some protective magic for themselves, but no Egyptian—not even the human go-betweens for their gods—was able to escape the plagues. Only the Hebrews were immune to them.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Yahweh's Condemnation of Magic and Magicians***

After Yahweh devastated Egypt with the plagues he brought the Israelites out of slavery and into a new land. They were his special people, and he began to dwell among them:

(45) I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God.  
(46) And they will know that I am Yahweh their God,  
who brought them out of the land of Egypt, so that I  
might dwell among them. I am Yahweh their God.

—Exodus 29:45-46 HCSB

Yahweh also gave Israel the Ten Commandments and his law. In his law he told his people what they had to do to honor and worship him. Yahweh is a holy God, and they had to conduct themselves in holiness if he was to dwell among them:

I am Yahweh, who brought you up from the land of  
Egypt to be your God, so you must be holy because I am  
holy.

—Leviticus 11:45 HCSB

The Old Testament law was a covenant: a binding contract offered by Yahweh to Israel that Israel had agreed to.<sup>10</sup> The requirements of the law were the things Israel had to do to be holy in Yahweh's eyes, and to have him continue to dwell among them.

Yahweh promised blessings on those who obeyed his law and curses on those who did not. Some acts of disobedience were so abhorrent to

his holy nature that those who committed them were to be immediately put to death. These sins included murder,<sup>11</sup> adultery,<sup>12</sup> homosexuality,<sup>13</sup> kidnapping,<sup>14</sup> bestiality,<sup>15</sup> and the practice of pharmakia.

The next verse that refers to those who practice drug-magic is Exodus 22:18. In this verse Yahweh commanded that the pharmakos were to be executed:

You must not allow a sorceress [pharmakos] to live.

—Exodus 22:18 HCSB

The word *pharmakos* is in its feminine form in this verse, but Yahweh had no double standard for obedience to his commands based on gender. All those who practiced pharmakia were to be put to death under the law.

The next verse that refers to the pharmakos is Deuteronomy 18:10. Yahweh told his people:

(10) Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft [is a pharmakos], (11) or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. (12) Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.

—Deuteronomy 18:10–12

This passage lists eight different types of occult magic. This is the most extensive list of types of magic in the Bible, but it is nowhere near exhaustive. There are dozens of types of magic. Nor can we use this list to clearly delineate one type of magician from another, because magicians often perform numerous types of magic. Some magicians specialize in certain practices such as séances or casting spells, but performing one type of magic often involves the use of others. For example, a magician may try to learn what happened in the past (divination) by speaking to the spirit of an ancestor (consulting the dead), and he may use drugs (pharmakia) to do so.

The Bible doesn't list all these types of magic to teach us about magic. It lists them to show us that Yahweh condemns all types of magic.

## The Drug-magic of Queen Jezebel

The next reference to drug use in the Bible is found in 2 Kings 9:22. This verse reveals the frequent pharmakia of Queen Jezebel.